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SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the moſt Reverend

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LATE

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M DCC XLIII.

SERMON CXI.

The danger of all known sin, both from the light of nature and revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of GOD *is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of* GOD *is manifest in them, for* GOD *hath shewed it unto them.*

SERM. CXI.

The first sermon on this text.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the apostle declares that he was particularly designed and appointed by GOD to preach the gospel to the world, and that he was not ashamed of his ministry, notwithstanding all the reproach and persecution it was attended withal, and notwithstanding the slight and undervaluing opinion which the world had of the doctrine which he preached, it being "to the Jews a "stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" for tho' this might reflect some disparagement upon it in the esteem of sensual and carnal men, yet to those who weighed things impartially, and consider'd the excellent end and design of the christian doctrine, and the force and efficacy of it to that end, it will appear to be an instrument admirably fitted by the wisdom of GOD, for the reformation and salvation of mankind.

I.

SERM. CXI.

And therefore he tells us, verse 16. that how much soever it was despised by that ignorant and inconsiderate age, "he was not ashamed of the gospel of CHRIST; because it is the power of GOD "unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the "Jew first, and also to the Greek;" that is, the doctrine of the gospel sincerely believed and embraced, is a most proper and powerful means, designed by GOD for the salvation of mankind; not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles.

The revelations which GOD had formerly made, were chiefly restrained to the jewish nation; but this great and last revelation of the gospel, was equally calculated for the benefit and advantage of all mankind. The gospel indeed was first preached to the Jews, and from thence publish'd to the whole world; and as this doctrine was design'd for the general benefit of mankind, so it was very likely to be effectual to that end, being an instrument equally fitted for the salvation of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews; "it is the power of GOD to salvation to every "one that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the "Greek."

And to shew the efficacy of it, he instanceth in two things, which render it so powerful and effectual a means for the salvation of mankind.

First, because therein the grace and mercy of GOD in the justification of a sinner, and declaring him righteous, is so clearly revealed, ver. 17. "For therein "is the righteousness of GOD revealed, from faith to "faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." This is very obscurely expressed, but the meaning of this text will be very much cleared, by comparing it with another in the iiid chapter of this epistle, ver.

20

20, 21, 22, &c. where the apoſtle ſpeaks more fully and expreſly of the way of our juſtification by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, that is, by the belief of the goſpel. He aſſerts at the 20th verſe, "that by the deeds of "the law there ſhall no fleſh be juſtified in the ſight "of GOD." To this way of juſtification "by the "deeds of the law," he oppoſeth "the righteouſ-"neſs of GOD by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, to "all, and upon all them that believe," which is the goſpel way of juſtification, ver. 21, 22. "But "now the righteouſneſs of GOD without the law is "manifeſted, being witneſſed by the law and the "prophets, even the righteouſneſs of GOD, which is "by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, unto all, and "upon all them that believe." "The righteouſneſs "of GOD without the law is manifeſted:" that is, the way which GOD hath taken to juſtify ſinners, and declare them righteous "without the deeds of the "law," that is, without obſerving the law of Moſes, "is manifeſted," that is, is clearly revealed in the goſpel, (which is the ſame with what the apoſtle had ſaid before, that "the righteouſneſs of GOD is "revealed in the goſpel) being witneſſed by the law "and the prophets," that is, the righteouſneſs of GOD, or the juſtification of ſinners by JESUS CHRIST, is clearly revealed in the goſpel, being alſo in a more obſcure manner atteſted or foretold in the old teſtament, which he calls "the law and "the prophets;" and this fully explains that difficult phraſe of "the righteouſneſs of GOD being re-"vealed by the goſpel from faith to faith;" that is, by a gradual revelation, being more obſcurely foretold in the old teſtament, and clearly diſcovered in the new; ſo that theſe two paſſages are equivalent;

SERM. CXI.

lent; "in the gospel, the righteousness of God is "revealed from faith to faith;" and "the righte- "ousness of God without the works of the law is "manifested, being witnessed by the law and the "prophets." There is the first and more imperfect revelation of it, but the clear revelation of it is in the gospel; this the apostle calls "a revelation from faith "to faith," that is from a more imperfect and obscure, to a more express and clear discovery and belief of it. And then the citation which follows is very pertinent, "as it is written, the just shall live by faith;" for this citation out of the old testament plainly shews, that the way of justification by faith was there mentioned; or, as our apostle expresseth it, "was witnessed by the "law and the prophets;" and consequently that this was a gradual discovery, which he calls "a revelation "from faith to faith." "The just shall live by faith;" that is, good men shall be saved by their faith, shall be justified and esteemed righteous in the sight of God, and finally saved by their faith. And so the apostle in the vth chap. of this epistle, ver. 18. calls our justification by the faith of the gospel, "the "justification of life," in opposition to condemnation and death, which very well explains that saying of the prophet, "the just shall live by faith." I have been the longer upon this, that I might give some light to a very difficult and obscure text.

Secondly, the other instance whereby the apostle proves the gospel to be so powerful a means for the recovery and salvation of men is, that therein also the severity of God against impenitent sinners, as well as his grace and mercy in the justification of the penitent, is clearly revealed, ver. 18. "For the wrath "of God is revealed from heaven, against all "ungodliness

SERM. CXI.

" ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold " the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which " may be known of GOD is manifeſted in them, for " GOD hath ſhewn it unto them." The firſt, viz. the grace of GOD in our juſtification and the remiſſion of ſins paſt, is a moſt proper and powerful argument to encourage us to obedience for the future; nothing being more likely to reclaim men to their duty, than the aſſurance of indemnity for paſt crimes; and the other is one of the moſt effectual conſiderations in the world to deter men from ſin, that " the " wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven againſt all " ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, &c."

From which words I ſhall obſerve theſe ſix things.

Firſt, the infinite danger that a wicked and ſinful courſe doth plainly expoſe men to. " The wrath of " GOD is here ſaid to be revealed againſt the impiety " and unrighteouſneſs of men."

Secondly, the clear and undoubted revelation which the goſpel hath made of this danger. " The wrath " of GOD " againſt the ſins of men, is ſaid to be " revealed from heaven."

Thirdly, that every wicked and vicious practice doth expoſe men to this great danger. " The wrath " of GOD " is ſaid to be " revealed againſt all un- " godlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men."

Fourthly, that it is a very great aggravation of ſin, for men to offend againſt the light of their own minds. The apoſtle here aggravates the impiety and wickedneſs of the heathen world, that they did not live up to the knowledge which they had of GOD, but contradicted it in their lives, which he calls " holding " the truth in unrighteouſneſs."

Fifthly,

SERM. CXI.

Fifthly, the natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live wickedly, is a clear evidence of their "holding the truth in unrighteousness." The apostle therefore chargeth them with "holding the truth "in unrighteousness," because "that which may "be known of God is manifested in them, God having shewed it to them."

Sixthly, and lastly, that the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the gospel, against the impiety and wickedness of men, renders it a very powerful and likely means for the recovery and salvation of men. For the apostle proves "the gospel of Christ to be the power of God "to salvation," because "therein the wrath of God is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" that is, against all impenitent sinners.

I shall at the present, by God's assistance, speak to the three first of these particulars.

First, the infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. If there be a God that made the world, and governs it, and takes care of mankind, and hath given them laws and rules to live by, he cannot but be greatly displeased at the violation and transgression of them; and certainly the displeasure of God is the most dreadful thing in the world, and the effects of it the most insupportable. The greatest fear is from the greatest danger, and the greatest danger is from the greatest power offended and enraged; and this is a consideration exceeding full of terror, that by a sinful course we expose ourselves to the utmost displeasure of the great and terrible God; for "who knows the "power of his wrath?" and "who may stand be"fore him when once he is angry? according to thy

" thy fear, so is thy wrath" (saith the Psalmist.) SERM. CXI.
There is no passion in the mind of man that is more boundless and infinite than our fear; it is apt to make wild and frightful representations of evils, and to imagine them many times greater than really they are; but in this case our imagination must fall short of the truth and terror of the thing; for the wrath of GOD doth far exceed the utmost jealousy and suspicion of the most fearful and guilty conscience; and the greatest sinner under his greatest anguish and despair, cannot apprehend or fear it more than there is reason for; " according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

If it were only the wrath and displeasure of men that the sinner were exposed to, there might be reason enough for fear, because they have many times power enough to crush an offender, and cruelty enough to fret every vein of his body, and to torment him in every part: but the wrath and vengeance of men bears no comparison with the wrath of GOD. Their passions are many times strong and blustering; but their arm is but short, and their power small, " they have not an arm like GOD, nor " can they thunder with a voice like him." They may design considerable harm and mischief to us; but it is not always in the power of their hand to wreak their malice upon us, and to execute all the mischief which their enraged minds may prompt them to; the very utmost they can design, is to torment our bodies, and to take away our lives, and when they have designed this, they may die first, and " re- " turn to their dust, and then their thoughts perish " with them," and all their malicious designs are at an end; they are always under the power and go-

I.

SERM. CXI.

vernment of a superior being, and can go no farther than he gives them leave. However if they do their worst, and shoot all their arrows at us, we cannot stand at the mark long, their wrath will soon make an end of us, and set us free from all their cruelty and oppression; "they can but kill the body, and "after that they have no more that they can do;" their most refined malice cannot reach our spirits, no weapon that can be formed by the utmost art of man can pierce and wound our souls; they can drive us out of this world, but they cannot pursue us into the other; so that at the worst the grave will be a sanctuary to us, and death a safe retreat from all their rage and fury.

But the wrath of GOD is not confined by any of these limits. "Once hath GOD spoken" (saith David by an elegant hebrew phrase to express the certainty of the thing) "once hath GOD "spoken, and twice I have heard this, that "power belongs to GOD," Psal. lxii. 11. "He "hath a mighty arm," and when he pleaseth to stretch it out, none may stay it, nor "say unto him "what dost thou;" he hath power enough to make good all his threatnings; whatever he says he is able to effect, and whatever he "purposeth he can "bring to pass;" for "his counsel shall stand, and "he will accomplish all his pleasure;" he need but speak the word, and it is done; for we can neither resist his power, nor fly from it; if we fly to the utmost parts of the earth, his hand can reach us, for "in his hand are all the corners of the earth;" if we take refuge in the grave (and we cannot do that without his leave) thither his wrath can follow us; and there it will overtake us; for his power is not confined to this world,

world, nor limited to our bodies;" after he hath kill'd, he can "deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell."

And this is that wrath of GOD which is "revealed "from heaven," and which the apoſtle chiefly intends, viz. the miſery and puniſhment of another world, this GOD hath threatned ſinners withal; to expreſs which to us, as fully as words can do, he heaps up in the next chapter ſo many weighty and terrible words, "indignation and wrath, tribulation "and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth "evil;" in oppoſition to that great and glorious reward of "immortality and eternal life," which is promiſed to "a patient continuance in well-"doing."

So that "the wrath of GOD" which is here denounced "againſt the impiety and unrighteouneſs "of men," comprehends all the evils and miſeries of this and the other world, which every ſinner is in danger of whilſt he continues impenitent; for as according to the tenor of the goſpel, "godlineſs "hath the promiſes of this life, and of that which is "to come," ſo impenitency in ſin expoſeth men to the evils of both worlds, to the judgments of the life that now is, and to the endleſs and intolerable torments of that which is to come. And what can be more dreadful than the diſpleaſure of an almighty and eternal being? who can puniſh to the utmoſt, and "who lives for ever," to execute his wrath and vengeance upon ſinners; ſo that well might the apoſtle ſay, "it is a fearful thing to fall "into the hands of the living GOD."

"Conſider this, all ye that forget GOD," that neglect him, and live in continual diſobedience to his holy and righteous laws; much more thoſe who de-

SERM. CIX.

ſpiſe and affront him, and live in a perpetual defiance of him. "Will ye provoke the LORD to "jealouſy? are ye ſtronger than he?" think of it ſeriouſly, and forget him if you can, deſpiſe him if you dare; conſider this, leſt he take you into conſideration, and rouze like a lion out of ſleep, and "tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." This is the firſt obſervation, the infinite danger that a wicked and ſinful courſe doth expoſe men to, "the wrath of GOD," which doth not only ſignify more than all the evils that we know, but than all thoſe which the wildeſt fears and ſuſpicions of our minds can imagine.

Secondly, the next thing obſervable, is the clear and undoubted revelation which the goſpel has made of this danger, "the wrath of GOD is re-"vealed, &c." By which the apoſtle intimates to us, that this was but obſcurely known to the world before, at leaſt in compariſon of that clear diſcovery which the goſpel hath now made of it; ſo that I may allude to that expreſſion in Job, which he applies to death and the grave, that "hell is naked "before us, and deſtruction hath no covering."

Not but that mankind had always apprehenſions and jealouſies of the danger of a wicked life, and ſinners were always afraid of the vengeance of GOD purſuing their evil deeds, not only in this life, but after it too; and tho' they had turn'd the puniſhments of another world into ridiculous fables, yet the wiſer ſort of mankind could not get it out of their minds, that there was ſomething real under them; and that Ixion's wheel, which by a perpetual motion carried him about; and Siſyphus his ſtone; which he was perpetually rolling up the hill, and

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when he had got it near the top tumbled down, and ſtill created him a new labour; and Tantalus his continual hunger and thirſt, aggravated by a perpetual nearneſs of enjoyment, and a perpetual diſappointment; and Prometheus his being chained to a rock, with an eagle or vulture perpetually preying upon his liver, which grew as faſt as it was gnawed; I ſay even the wiſer among the heathens look'd upon theſe as fantaſtical repreſentations of ſomething that was real, viz. the grievous and endleſs puniſhment of ſinners, the not to be endured, and yet perpetually renewed torments of another world, for in the midſt of all the ignorance and degeneracy of the heathen world, mens conſciences did accuſe them when they did amiſs, and they had ſecret fears and miſgivings of ſome mighty danger hanging over them from the diſpleaſure of a ſuperior being, and the apprehenſion of ſome great miſchiefs likely to follow their wicked actions, which ſome time or other would overtake them; which becauſe they did not always in this world, they dreaded them in the next. And this was the foundation of all thoſe ſuperſtitions, whereby the ancient pagans endeavoured ſo carefully to appeaſe their offended deities, and to avert the calamities which they feared they would ſend down upon them. But all this while they had no certain aſſurance by any clear and expreſs revelation from GOD to that purpoſe, but only the jealouſies and ſuſpicions of their own minds, naturally conſequent upon thoſe notions which men generally had of GOD, but ſo obſcured and depraved by the luſts and vices of men, and by the groſs and falſe conceptions which they had of GOD, that they only ſery'd to make them ſuperſtitious, but were not

SERM. CXI.

not clear and strong enough to make them wisely and seriously religious. And to speak the truth, the more knowing and inquisitive part of the heathen world had brought all these things into great doubt and uncertainty, by the nicety and subtilty of disputes about them; so that it was no great wonder, that these principles had no greater effect upon the lives of men, when their apprehensions of them were so dark and doubtful.

But the gospel hath made a most clear and certain revelation of these things to mankind. It was written before upon mens hearts as the great sanction of the law of nature, but the impressions of this were in a great measure blurred and worn out, so that it had no great power and efficacy, upon the minds and manners of men; but now it is clearly discovered to us, "the wrath of God is revealed "from heaven," which expression may well imply in it these three things.

First, the clearness of the discovery; "the wrath "of God is said to be revealed."

Secondly, the extraordinary manner of it; it is said to be "revealed from heaven."

Thirdly, the certainty of it; not being the result of subtle and doubtful reasonings, but having a divine testimony and confirmation given to it, which is the proper meaning of "being revealed "from heaven."

First, it imports the clearness of the discovery. The punishment of sinners in another world is not so obscure a matter as it was before; it is now expressly declared in the gospel, together with the particular circumstances of it, namely, that there is another life after this, wherein men shall receive the

just

juſt recompence of reward for all the actions done by them in this life; that there is a particular time appointed, wherein GOD will call all the world to a ſolemn account, and thoſe who are in their graves ſhall by a powerful voice be raiſed to life, and thoſe who ſhall then be found alive ſhall be ſuddenly changed; "when our LORD JESUS CHRIST," the eternal and only begotten SON of GOD, who once came in great humility to ſave us, ſhall come again "in power, and great glory," attended with his mighty angels, and "all nations ſhall be gathered "before him," and all mankind ſhall be ſeparated into two companies, the righteous and the wicked, who after a full hearing, and fair trial, ſhall be ſentenced according to their actions, the one "to eter-"nal life and happineſs," the other "to everlaſt-"ing miſery and torment."

So that the goſpel hath not only declared the thing to us, that there ſhall be a future judgment; but for our farther aſſurance and ſatisfaction in this matter, and that theſe things might make a deep impreſſion, and ſtrike a great awe upon our minds, GOD hath been pleaſed to reveal it to us with a great many particular circumſtances, ſuch as are very worthy of GOD, and apt to fill the minds of men with dread and aſtoniſhment, as often as they think of them.

For the circumſtances of this judgment revealed to us in the goſpel, are very ſolemn and awful, not ſuch as the wild fancies and imaginations of men would have been apt to have dreſt it up withal, ſuch as are the fictions of the heathen poets, and the extravagancies of Mahomet; which tho' they be terrible enough, yet they are withal ridiculous; but ſuch as are every way becoming the majeſty of the great

SERM. CXI.

great GOD, and the solemnity of the great day, and such as do not in the least savour of the vanity and lighness of humane imagination.

For what more fair and equal, than that men should be tried by a man like themselves, one of the same rank and condition, that had experience of the infirmities and temptations of humane nature? so our LORD tells us, that "the FATHER hath committed all judgment to the SON, because he is the "SON of man," and therefore cannot be excepted against, as not being a fit and equal judge. And this St. Paul offers as a clear proof of the equitable proceedings of that day; "GOD (says he) hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world "in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained."

And then what more congruous than that the SON of GOD, who had taken so much pains for the salvation of men, and came into the world for that purpose, and had used all imaginable means for the reformation of mankind, I say what more congruous, than that this very person should be honoured by GOD to sit in judgment upon the world, and to condemn those, who after all the means that had been tried for their recovery, would not repent and be saved. And what more proper, than that men, who are to be judged for "things done in the body," should be judged in the body, and consequently that the resurrection of the dead should preceed the general judgment?

And what more magnificent and suitable to this glorious solemnity, than the awful circumstances which the scripture mentions of the appearance of this great judge; that he shall "descend from "heaven"

SERM. CXI.

" heaven" in great majesty and glory, attended with " his mighty angels, and that every eye shall see " him;" that upon his appearance, the frame of nature shall be in an agony, and the whole world in flame and confusion; that those great and glorious bodies of light shall be obscured, and by degrees extinguish'd; " the sun shall be darkned, and the " moon turned into blood, and all the powers of " heaven shaken;" yea, " the heavens themselves " shall pass away with a great noise, and the ele- " ments dissolve with fervent heat; the earth also, " and all the works that are therein shall be burnt " up." I appeal to any man, whether this be not a representation of things very proper and suitable to that great day, wherein he who made the world shall come to judge it? and whether the wit of man ever devised any thing so awful, and so agreeable to the majesty of GOD, and the solemn judgment of the whole world? The description which Virgil makes of the judgment of another world, of the elysian fields, and the infernal regions, how infinitely do they fall short of the majesty of the holy scripture, and the description there made of heaven and hell, and of the great and terrible day of the LORD! so that in comparison they are childish and trifling; and yet perhaps he had the most regular and most govern'd imagination of any man that ever lived, and observed the greatest decorum in his characters and descriptions. But who can declare " the great " things of GOD, but he to whom GOD shall re- " veal them!"

Secondly, this expression of " the wrath of GOD " being revealed from heaven," doth not only im-

I.

SERM. CIX.

ply the clear discovery of the thing, but likewise something extraordinary in the manner of the discovery. It is not only a natural impression upon the minds of men, that GOD will severely punish sinners; but he hath taken care that mankind should be instructed in this matter in a very particular and extraordinary manner. He hath not left it to the reason of men to collect it from the consideration of his attributes and perfections, his holiness and justice, and from the consideration of the promiscuous administration of his providence towards good and bad men in this world, but he hath been pleased to send an extraordinary person from heaven, on purpose to declare this thing plainly to the world, "the wrath "of GOD is revealed from heaven;" that is, GOD sent his own SON from heaven, on purpose to declare his wrath against all obstinate and impenitent sinners, that he might effectually awaken the drowsy world to repentance; he hath sent an extraordinary ambassador into the world, to give warning to all those who continue in their sins, of the judgment of the great day, and to summon them before his dreadful tribunal. So the apostle tells the Athenians, Acts xvii. 30, 31. "Now he commandeth all men every "where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in "which he will judge the world in righteousness, "by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he "hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath "raised him from the dead."

Thirdly, this expression implies likewise the certainty of this discovery. If the wrath of God had only been declared in the discourses of wise men, tho' grounded upon very probable reason, yet it might have been brought into doubt by the contrary reasonings

ings of subtle and disputing men: but to put the matter out of all question, we have a divine testimony for it, and GOD hath confirmed it from heaven, by signs, and wonders, and miracles, especially by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead; for "by this he hath given assurance unto all men, "that it is he who is ordained of GOD to judge the "quick and the dead."

Thus you see in what respect "the wrath of GOD" is said to be "revealed from heaven," in that the gospel hath made a more clear, and particular, and certain discovery of the judgment of the great day, than ever was made to the world before. I proceed to the

Third observation, which I shall speak but briefly to; namely, that every wicked and vicious practice doth expose men to this dreadful danger. The apostle instanceth in the two chief heads to which the sins of men may be reduced, impiety towards GOD, and unrighteousness towards men; and therefore he is to be understood to denounce the wrath of GOD against every particular kind of sin, comprehended under these general heads; so that no man that allows himself in any impiety and wickedness of life, can hope to escape the wrath of GOD. Therefore it concerns us to be entirely religious, and "to have "respect to all GOD's commandments;" and to take heed that we do not allow ourselves in the practice of any kind of sin whatsoever, because the living in any one known sin, is enough to expose us to the dreadful wrath of GOD. Tho' a man be just and righteous in his dealings with men, yet if he neglect the worship and service of GOD, this will certainly bring him under condemnation: and on the other hand, tho' a man may serve GOD never so diligently and devout-

SERM. CXI.

ly, yet if he be defective in righteousness toward men, if he deal falsly and fraudulently with his neighbour, he shall not escape the wrath of GOD; tho' a man pretend to never so much piety and devotion, yet if he be unrighteous, "he shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD;" if any man "overreach and defraud his brother in any matter, "the LORD is the avenger of such," saith St. Paul 1 Thess. iv. 6.

So that here is a very powerful argument to take men off from all sin, and to engage them to a constant and careful discharge of their whole duty toward GOD and men, and to reform whatever is amiss either in the frame and temper of their minds, or in the actions and course of their lives; because any kind of wickedness, any one sort of vicious course, lays men open to the vengeance of GOD, and the punishments of another world; "the wrath of GOD is revealed from "heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness "of men;" there is no exception in the case, we must forsake all sin, subdue every lust, "be holy in "all manner of conversation," otherwise we can have no reasonable hopes of escaping the wrath of GOD, and the damnation of hell. But to proceed to the

Fourth observation; namely, that it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The apostle here aggravates the wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to that knowledge which they had of GOD, but contradicted it in their lives, "holding the truth of GOD in unrighteousness." And that he speaks here of the heathen, is plain from his following discourse, and the character he gives of those

thoſe perſons of whom he was ſpeaking, "who hold "the truth of GOD in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that "which may be known of GOD is manifeſt in them, "for GOD hath ſhewn it unto them;" and this he proves, becauſe thoſe who were deſtitute of divine revelation, were not without all knowledge of GOD, being led by the ſight of this viſible world, to the knowledge of an inviſible being and power that was the author of it, ver. 20, 21. "For the inviſible things "of him from the creation of the world are clearly "ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are "made, even his eternal power and godhead, "ſo that they are without excuſe; becauſe that when "they knew GOD, they glorified him not as GOD." (*Hæc eſt ſumma delicti, nolle agnoſcere, quem ignorare non poſſis*, ſaith Tertullian to the heathen; "this is "the height of thy fault, not to acknowledge him, "whom thou canſt not but know, not to own him, "of whom thou canſt not be ignorant if thou "wouldſt;") "neither were thankful;" they did not pay thoſe acknowledgments to him which of right were due to the author of their being, and of all good things; ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, "they were fool'd with their own reaſonings." This he ſpeaks of the philoſophers, who in thoſe great arguments of the being and providence of GOD, the immortality of the ſoul, and the rewards of another world, had loſt the truth by too much ſubtilty about it, and had diſputed themſelves into doubt and uncertainty about thoſe things which were naturally known; for *nimiùm altercando veritas amittitur*; "truth is many times loſt by too much con- "tention and diſpute about it, and by too eager a "purſuit of it men many times out-run it; and "leave

SERM. CXI.

SERM. CXI.

" leave it behind;" ver. 22. " and professing themselves to be wise they became fools." Men never play the fools more, than by endeavouring to be over-subtle and wise; ver. 23. " and changed the glory of " the incorruptible GOD, into an image made like to " corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed " beasts, and creeping things;" here he speaks of the sottishness of their idolatry, whereby they provoked GOD to give them up to all manner of lewdness and impurity, ver. 24. " wherefore GOD also " gave them up unto uncleanness, through the lusts " of their own hearts;" and again, ver. 26. " for " this cause GOD gave them up to vile affections;" and then he enumerates the abominable lusts and vices they were guilty of, notwithstanding their natural acknowledgment of the divine justice, ver. 32. " who knowing the judgment of GOD, that they " which commit such things are worthy of death, " not only do the same, but have pleasure in them " that do them." By all which it appears that he speaks of the heathen, who offended against the natural light of their own minds, and therefore were without excuse. *Quam sibi veniam sperare possunt impietatis suæ, qui non agnoscunt cultum ejus, quem prorsùs ignorari ab hominibus fas non est?* saith Lactantius, " how can they hope for pardon of their impiety, " who deny to worship that GOD, of whom it is " not possible mankind should be wholly ignorant?"

So that this is " to hold the truth in unrighteousness," injuriously to suppress it, and to hinder the power and efficacy of it upon our minds and actions; for so the word κατέχειν sometimes signifies, as well as to hold fast, and this every man does, who acts

acts contrary to what he believes and knows; he offers violence to the light of his own mind, and does injury to the truth, and keeps that a prisoner, which would set him free; "ye shall know the "truth (says our LORD) and the truth shall make "you free." SERM. CXI.

And this is one of the highest aggravations of the sins of men, to offend against knowledge, and that light which GOD hath set up in every man's mind. If men wander and stumble in the dark, it is not to be wonder'd at; many times it is unavoidable, and no care can prevent it: but in the light it is expected men should look before them, and discern their way. That natural light which the heathen had, though it was but comparatively dim and imperfect, yet the apostle takes notice of it as a great aggravation of their idolatrous and abominable practices. Those natural notions which all men have of GOD, if they had in any measure attended to them, and govern'd themselves by them, might have been sufficient to have preserved them from dishonouring the deity, by worshipping creatures instead of GOD; the common light of nature was enough to have discovered to them the evil of those lewd and unnatural practices, which many of them were guilty of; but they detained and suppress the truth most injuriously, and would not suffer it to have its natural and proper influence upon them; and this is that which left them without excuse, that from the light of nature they had knowledge enough to have done better, and to have preserved them from those great crimes which were so common among them.

And

SERM. CXI.

And if this was so great an aggravation of the impiety and wickedness of the heathen, and left them "without excuse;" what apology can be made for the impiety and unrighteousness of christians, who have so strong and clear a light to discover to them their duty, and the danger of neglecting it, to whom "the wrath of GOD is plainly revealed "from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighte-"ousness of men?" The truths of the gospel are so very clear and powerful, and such an improvement of natural light, that men must use great force and violence to suppress them, and to hinder the efficacy of them upon their lives. And this is a certain rule, by how much the greater our knowledge, by so much the less is our excuse, and so much the greater punishment is due to our faults. So our LORD hath told us, Luke xii. 47. "That servant which knew "his LORD's will, and prepared not himself, nei-"ther did according to his will, shall be beaten "with many stripes." And John ix. 41. "If ye "were blind (says our SAVIOUR to the Jews) ye "should have no sin." So much ignorance as there is of our duty, so much abatement of the wilfulness of our faults: but "if we sin wilfully, af-"ter we have received the knowledge of the truth, "there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fear-"ful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation," says the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. x. 26, 27. "If we sin wilfully after we have received the "knowledge of the truth;" implying, that men cannot pretend ignorance for their faults, after so clear a revelation of the will of GOD, as is made to mankind by the gospel.

And

And upon this consideration it is, that our SAVIOUR doth so aggravate the impenitency and unbelief of the Jews, because it was in opposition to all the advantages of knowledge, which can be imagined to be afforded to mankind, John xv. 22, 23, 24. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, "they had not had sin;" that is, in comparison their sin had been much more excusable; "but now they "have no cloke for their sin." "He that hateth me, "hateth my FATHER also: if I had not done "among them the works which none other man "did, they had not had sin; but now have they "both seen, and hated both me, and my FATHER." How is that? Our SAVIOUR means, that they had now sinned against all the advantages of knowing the will of GOD, that mankind could possibly have: at once opposing natural light, which was the dispensation of the FATHER; and the clearest revelation of GOD's will, in the dispensation of the gospel by his SON; "now have they both seen and "hated both me and FATHER."

The two remaining observations I shall reserve to another opportunity.

SERMON CXII.

The danger of all known sin, both from the light of nature and revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of GOD *is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of* GOD *is manifest in them, for* GOD *hath shewed it unto them.*

SERM. CXII.

The second sermon on this text.

I Have handled four of the observations which I rais'd from these words; and shall now proceed to the other two that remain.

The fifth observation was, that the natural knowledge which men have of GOD, if they live contrary to it, is a sufficient evidence of "their holding the truth "of GOD in unrighteousness." For the reason why the apostle chargeth them with this, is, "because "that which may be known of GOD is manifest, in "that GOD hath shewed it unto them."

There is a natural knowledge of GOD, and of the duty we owe to him, which the apostle calls τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, "that of GOD which is obvious to be "known" by the light of nature, and is as much as is absolutely necessary for us to know. There is something of GOD that is incomprehensible, and beyond the reach of our understandings; but his being and essential perfections may be known, which he calls his eternal power and godhead; these he tells

tells us "are clearly seen, being understood by the "things which are made;" that is, the creation of the world is a plain demonstration to men, of the being and power of GOD; and if so, then "GOD "is naturally known to men;" the contrary whereof Socinus positively maintains, tho' therein he be forsaken by most of his followers; an opinion, in my judgment, very unworthy of one, who, not without reason, was esteemed so great a master of reason; and (tho' I believe he did not see it) undermining the strongest and surest foundation of all religion, which, when the natural notions of GOD are once taken away, will certainly want its best support. Besides that by denying any natural knowledge of GOD, and his essential perfections, he freely gives away one of the most plausible grounds of opposing the doctrine of the Trinity. But because this is a matter of great consequence, and he was a great man, and is not to be confuted by contempt, but by better reason, if it can be found; I will consider his reasons for this opinion, and return a particular answer to them. SERM. CXII.

First, he says that if the knowledge of GOD were natural, it would not be of faith; but the apostle says, that "we must believe that he is." The force of which argument, if it have any, lies in this, that the object of faith is divine revelation, and therefore we cannot be said to believe what we naturally know. The schoolmen indeed say so; but the scripture useth the word faith more largely, for a real persuasion of any thing, whether grounded upon sense, or reason, or divine revelation. And our SAVIOUR's speech to Thomas, "because thou hast "seen, thou hast believed," does sufficiently inti-

SERM. CXII.

mate, that a man may believe what he sees; and if so, what should hinder, but that a man may be said to believe what he naturally knows; that is, be really persuaded that there is a God from natural light?

Secondly, his next argument is, because the same apostle concludes Enoch to have believed God, because he pleased God, "and without faith it is "impossible to please him." From whence he says it is certain that men may be without this belief, which if it be natural they cannot. Indeed if the apostle had said, that whoever believes a God, must of necessity obey and please him, then the inference had been good, that all men do not naturally believe a God, because it is certain they do not please him; but it is not good the other way, no more than if a man should argue thus, that because whoever acts reasonably, must be endowed with reason, therefore men are not naturally endowed with reason. For as men may naturally be endowed with reason, and yet not always make use of it; so men may naturally know and believe a God, and yet not be careful to please him.

His third argument is, that the scripture says that there are some that do not believe a God, for which he cites that of David, "the fool hath said in his "heart there is no God;" which certainly proves, that bad men live so, as if they believed there were no God; nay, it may farther import, that they endeavour as much as they can, to stifle and extinguish the belief of a God in their minds, and would gladly persuade themselves there is no God, because it is convenient for them there should be none; and whether David meant so or not, is is very probable

bable that some may arrive to that height of impiety, as for a time at least, and in some moods, to disbelieve a God, and to be very confident of the arguments on that side. But what then? is the knowledge and belief of a GOD therefore not natural to mankind? nature it self, as constant and uniform as it is, admits of some irregularities and exceptions, in effects that are meerly natural, much more in those which have something in them that is voluntary, and depends upon the good or bad use of our reason and understanding; and there is no arguing from what is monstrous, against what is natural. It is natural for men to have five fingers upon a hand, and yet some are born otherwise: but in voluntary agents, that which is natural may be perverted, and in a great measure extinguish'd in some particular instances; so that there is no force at all in this objection.

His fourth and last argument is, that there have not only been particular persons, but whole nations who have had no sense, nor so much as suspicion of a deity. This I confess were of great force, if it were true; and for the proof of this, he produceth the instance of Brasil in America. But I utterly deny the matter of fact and history, and challenge any man to bring good testimony, not only of any nation, but of any city in the world, that ever were professed atheists.

I know this was affirmed of some part of Brasil, by some of the first discoverers, who yet at the same time owned, that these very people did most expresly believe the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments of another life; opinions which no man can well reconcile with the denial and

SERM. CXII.

and disbelief of a deity. But to put an end to this argument, later and more perfect discoveries have found this not to be true, and do assure us upon better acquaintance with those barbarous people, that they are deeply possest with the belief of one supreme GOD, who made and governs the world.

Having thus given a particular answer to Socinus his arguments against the natural knowledge of a GOD, I will now briefly offer some arguments for it. And to prove that the knowledge and belief of a GOD is natural to mankind, my

First argument shall be from the universal consent, in this matter, of all nations in all ages. And this is an argument of great force, there being no better way to prove any thing to be natural to any kind of being, than if it be generally found in the whole kind. *Omnium consensus naturæ vox est*, "the consent of all is the voice of nature," saith Tully. And indeed by what other argument can we prove that reason, and speech, and an inclination to society are natural to men; but that these belong to the whole kind?

Secondly, unless the knowledge of GOD and his essential perfections be natural, I do not see what sufficient and certain foundation there can be of revealed religion. For unless we naturally know GOD to be a being of all perfection, and consequently that whatever he says is true, I cannot see what divine revelation can signify. For GOD's revealing or declaring such a thing to us, is no necessary argument that it is so, unless antecedently to this revelation, we be possest firmly with this principle, that whatever GOD says is true. And whatever is known antecedently to revelation, must be known by

by natural light, and by reaſonings and deductions from natural principles. I might farther add to this argument, that the only ſtandard and meaſure to judge of divine revelations, and to diſtinguiſh between what are true, and what are counterfeit, are the natural notions which men have of GOD and of his eſſential perfections. SERM. CXII.

Thirdly, if the notion of a GOD be not natural, I do not ſee how men can have any natural notion of the difference of moral good and evil, juſt, and unjuſt. For if I do not naturally know there is a GOD, how can I naturally know that there is any law obliging to the one, and forbidding the other? all law and obligation to obedience, neceſſarily ſuppoſing the authority of a ſuperior being. But the apoſtle expreſly aſſerts, that the Gentiles who were deſtitute of a revealed law, "were a law unto themſelves;" but there cannot be a natural law obliging mankind, unleſs GOD be naturally known to them.

And this Socinus himſelf in his diſcourſe upon this very argument is forced to acknowledge. "In "all men (ſays he) there is naturally a difference of "juſt, and unjuſt, or at leaſt there is planted in all "men an acknowledgment that juſt ought to be "preferr'd before unjuſt, and that which is honeſt, "before the contrary; and this is nothing elſe but "the word of GOD within a man, which whoſoever obeys, in ſo doing obeys GOD, tho' "otherwiſe he neither know nor think there is a "GOD; and there is no doubt but he that thus obeys "GOD, is accepted of him." So that here is an acknowledgment of a natural obligation to a law, without any natural knowledge of a ſuperior authority;

SERM. CXII.

rity; which I think cannot be; and which is worse, that a man may obey GOD acceptably, without knowing and believing there is a GOD; which directly thwarts the ground of his first argument from those words of the apostle, "without faith it is impossible to please GOD; for he that cometh to "GOD," that is, he that will be religious and please GOD, "must believe that he is;" so hard is it for any man to contradict nature, without contradicting himself.

Fourthly, my last argument I ground upon the words of the apostle in my text, "that which may "be known of GOD, is manifest in them; for GOD "hath shewed it unto them." "is manifest in "them, ἐν αὐτοῖς among them," GOD hath sufficiently manifested it to mankind. And which way hath GOD done this? by revelation? or by the natural light of reason? he tells us at the 20th verse, "for the invisible things of him from the creation "of the world are clearly seen;" that is, GOD, who in himself is invisible, ever since he hath created the world, hath given a visible demonstration of himself, that is, "of his eternal power "and Godhead, being understood by the things "which are made." The plain sense of the whole is, that this wise and wonderful frame of the world, which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause but GOD, is a sensible demonstration to all mankind, of an eternal and powerful being that was the author and framer of it. The only question now is, whether this text speaks of the knowledge of GOD by particular revelation, or by natural light and reason, from the contemplation of the works of GOD? Socinus having no other way to avoid

avoid the force of this text, will needs understand it of the knowledge of GOD by the revelation of the gospel. His words are these; "the apostle "therefore says in this place, that the eternal God-"head of GOD, that is, that which GOD would "always have us to do (for the Godhead is some-"times taken in this sense) and his eternal power, "that is, his promise which never fails, (in which "sense he said a little before that the gospel is "the power of GOD) these, I say, were never "seen by men, that is, were never known to "them since the creation of the world, are known "by his works, that is, by the wonderful operation "of GOD, and divine men, especially of CHRIST "and his apostles." These are his very words, and now I refer it to any indifferent judgment, whether this be not a very forced and constrained interpretation of this text; and whether that which I have before given, be not infinitely more free and natural, and every way more agreeable to the obvious sense of the words, and the scope of the apostle's argument. For he plainly speaks of the heathen, and proves them to be inexcusable, because "they "held the truth in unrighteousness," and having a natural knowledge of GOD, from the contemplation of his works, and the things which are made, "they did not glorify him as GOD." And therefore I shall not trouble my self to give any other answer to it; for by the absurd violence of it in every part, it confutes it self more effectually than any discourse about it can do.

I have been the larger upon this, because it is a matter of so great consequence, and lies at the bot-

I.

SERM. CXII.

tom of all religion. For the natural knowledge which men have of GOD, is when all is done, the sureſt and faſteſt hold that religion hath on humane nature. Beſides, how ſhould GOD judge that part of the world, who are wholly deſtitute of divine revelation, if they had no natural knowledge of him, and conſequently could not be under the direction and government of any law? For "where there is "no law, there is is no tranſgreſſion;" and where men are guilty of the breach of no law, they cannot be judged and condemned for it; for "the judgment "of GOD is according to truth."

And now this being eſtabliſh'd, that men have a natural knowledge of GOD; if they contradict it by their life and practice, they are guilty of "detaining the "truth of GOD in unrighteouſneſs." For by this argument the apoſtle proves the heathen to be guilty of "holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs," becauſe notwithſtanding the natural knowledge which they had of GOD "by the things which are made," they lived in the practice of groſs idolatry, and the moſt abominable ſins and vices.

And this concerns us much more, who have the glorious light of the goſpel added to the light of nature. For if they who offended againſt the light of nature, were liable to the judgment of GOD, of how much ſorer puniſhment ſhall we be thought worthy, if we neglect thoſe infinite advantages which the revelation of the goſpel hath ſuperadded to natural light? he hath now ſet our duty in the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt light that ever was afforded to mankind, ſo that if we will not now believe and repent, there is no remedy for us, but we muſt "die in our ſins; "if we ſin wilfully, after ſo much knowledge of the "truth,

" truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin; but SERM.
" a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indig- CXII.
" nation to conſume us."

The ſum of what hath been ſaid on this argument, is briefly this; that men have a natural knowledge of GOD, and of thoſe great duties which reſult from the knowledge of him; ſo that whatever men ſay, and pretend as to the main things of religion, " the " worſhip of GOD, and juſtice and righteouſneſs " towards men," ſetting aſide divine revelation, we are all naturally convinc'd of our duty, and of what we ought to do, and thoſe who live in a bad courſe, need only be put in mind of what they naturally know, better than any body elſe can tell them, that they are in a bad courſe, ſo that I may appeal to all wicked men from themſelves, raſh, and heated, and intoxicated with pleaſure and vanity, tranſported and hurried away by luſt and paſſion; to themſelves, ſerious and compoſed, and in a cool and conſiderate temper. And can any ſober man forbear to follow the convictions of his own mind, and to reſolve to do what he inwardly conſents to as beſt? let us but be true to ourſelves, and obey the dictates of our own minds, and give leave to our own conſcience to counſel us, and tell us what we ought to do, and we ſhall be " a law to ourſelves." I proceed to the

Sixth and laſt obſervation, namely, that the clear revelation of the wrath of GOD in the goſpel, againſt the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of men, is one principal thing which renders it ſo very powerful and likely a means for the ſalvation of mankind. For the apoſtle inſtanceth in two things, which give the goſpel ſo great an advantage to this purpoſe,

SERM. CXII.

the mercy of GOD to penitent sinners, and his severity toward the impenitent; both which are so fully and clearly revealed in the gospel. "The "gospel is the power of GOD to salvation, to every "one that believeth, because therein the righteous- "ness of GOD is revealed;" that is, his great grace and mercy in the justification and pardon of sinners by JESUS CHRIST, which I have already shewn to be meant by "the righteousness of GOD," by comparing this with the explication which is given of "the righteousness of GOD," chap. iii. ver. 22.

The other reason which he gives of the gospel's being "the power of GOD to salvation," is the plain declaration of the severity of GOD toward impenitent sinners, "because therein also the wrath of GOD is "revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness "and unrighteousness of men." The force of which argument will appear, if we consider these following particulars.

First, that the declarations of the gospel in this matter are so plain and express.

Secondly, that they are very dreadful and terrible.

Thirdly, that there is no safety or hope of impunity for men that go on and continue in their sins.

Fourthly, that this argument will take hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retain its force upon the minds of men, when all other considerations fail, and are of little or no efficacy. And,

Fifthly, that no religion in the world can urge this argument with that force and advantage that christianity does.

First,

SERM. CXII.

Firſt, that the declarations of the goſpel in this matter are moſt plain and expreſs; and that not only againſt ſin and wickedneſs in general, but againſt particular ſins and vices; ſo that no man that lives in any evil and vicious courſe, can be ignorant of his danger. Our LORD hath told us in general, what ſhall be the doom of the workers of iniquity, yea tho' they may have owned him, and made profeſſion of his name, Matth. vii. 21. "Not every "one that ſaith unto me, LORD, LORD, ſhall enter "into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the "will of my FATHER which is in heaven. Many "will ſay unto me in that day, LORD, LORD, &c. "then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you, "depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matth. xiii. 49, 50. "So ſhall it be at the end of the world, "the angels ſhall come forth, and ſever the wicked "from among the juſt, and ſhall caſt them into the "furnace of fire; there ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing "of teeth," Matth. xxv. 46. "The wicked ſhall "go away into everlaſting puniſhment, but the "righteous into life eternal." John v. 28, 29. "The "hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves "ſhall hear his voice, and ſhall come forth; they "that have done good, unto the reſurrection of life, "and they that have done evil, unto the reſurrection "of damnation." Rom. ii. 6. St. Paul tells us that there is "a day of wrath, and of the revelation of "the righteous judgment of GOD, who will render "to every man according to his deeds; to them "who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteouſ-"neſs, indignation and wrath, tribulation and an-"guiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil." 2 Theſſ. i. 7, 8, 9. "That the LORD JESUS ſhall be "revealed

SERM. CXII.

" revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in " flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know " not GOD, and that obey not the gospel of our " LORD JESUS CHRIST; who shall be punished " with everlasting destruction from the presence of " the LORD, and from the glory of his power." Nothing can be more plain and express than these general declarations of the wrath of GOD against sinners; that there is a day of judgment appointed, and a judge constituted to take cognisance of the actions of men, to pass a severe sentence, and to inflict a terrible punishment upon the workers of iniquity.

More particularly our LORD and his apostles have denounced the wrath of GOD against particular sins and vices. In several places of the new testament, there are catalogues given of particular sins, the practice whereof will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of heaven, and expose them to the wrath and vengeance of GOD. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. " Know ye not " that the unrighteous shall not inherit the king- " dom of GOD? Be not deceived, neither fornica- " tors, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, " nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor " thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, " nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of " GOD." So likewise, Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. " The " works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, " adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, variance, " emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, en- " vyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such " like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also " told you in times past, that they that do such " things shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD."

Col.

Col. iii. 5, 6. " Mortify therefore your members " upon earth, fornication, uncleanneſs, inordinate " affection, evil concupiſcence, and covetouſneſs, " which is idolatry, for which things ſake the wrath " of GOD cometh on the children of diſobedience." Rev. xxi. 8. " The fearful and unbelieving," (that is, thoſe who rejected the chriſtian religion, notwithſtanding the clear evidence that was offer'd for it, and thoſe who out of fear ſhould apoſtatize from it,) " The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable," (that is, thoſe who were guilty of unnatural luſts, not fit to be named) " and murderers, and whoremongers, " and ſorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars" (that is, all ſorts of falſe and deceitful and perfidious perſons) " ſhall have their part in the lake which burns " with fire and brimſtone, which is the ſecond death."

And not only theſe groſs and notorious ſins, which are ſuch plain violations of the law and light of nature; but thoſe wherein mankind have been apt to take more liberty, as if they were not ſufficiently convinced of the evil of them; as " the reſiſting of " civil authority," which the apoſtle tells us, they that are guilty of, " ſhall receive to themſelves dam- " nation," Rom. xiii. 2. " Profane ſwearing in " common converſation," which St. James tells us brings men under the danger of damnation, chap. v. 12. " Above all things, my brethren, " ſwear not, leſt ye fall under condemnation." Nay, our SAVIOUR hath told us plainly, that not only for wicked actions, but for every evil and ſinful word, men are obnoxious to the judgment of GOD. So our LORD aſſures us, Matth. xii. 36, 37. " I ſay unto " you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, " they ſhall give an account thereof in the day of " judgment.

SERM. CXII.

" judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." He had spoken before of that great and unpardonable sin of " blaspheming the HOLY GHOST;" and because this might be thought great severity for evil words, he declares the reason more fully, because words shew the mind and temper of the man, ver. 34. " For out of the abundance of the heart the " mouth speaketh." " The character of the man " is shewn by his words," saith Menander. *Profert enim mores plerumque oratio* (saith Quintilian) *& animi secreta detegit*; " A man's speech discovers his " manners, and the secrets of his heart; *ut vivit* " *etiam quemque dicere*, men commonly speak as " they live;" and therefore our SAVIOUR adds, " a good man out of the good treasure of his heart, " bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out " the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil " things: but I say unto you that every idle word, " πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργόν," by which I do not think our SAVIOUR means, that men shall be called to account at the day of judgment, for every trifling and impatient and unprofitable word, but every wicked and sinful word of any kind, as if he had said, do you think this severe to make words an unpardonable fault? I say unto you that men shall not only be condemned for their malicious and blasphemous speeches against the HOLY GHOST; but they shall likewise give a strict account for all other wicked and sinful speeches in any kind tho' much inferior to this. And this is not only most agreeable to the scope of our SAVIOUR, but is confirmed by some greek copies, in which it is πᾶν ῥῆμα πονηρόν, " every wicked " word which men shall speak, they shall be accountable

" countable for it at the day of judgment." But this by the by. SERM. CXII.

Our SAVIOUR likewiſe tells us, that men ſhall not only be proceeded againſt for ſins of commiſſion, but for the bare omiſſion and neglect of their duty, eſpecially in works of mercy and charity; for not feeding the hungry, and the like, as we ſee, Matth. xxv. and that for the omiſſion of theſe, he will paſs that terrible ſentence, " depart ye curſed, " &c." So that it nearly concerns us to be careful of our whole life, of all our words and actions, ſince the goſpel hath ſo plainly and expreſly declared, that " for all theſe things GOD will bring us " into judgment." And if the threatnings of the goſpel be true, " what manner of perſons ought " we to be, in all holy converſation and godli- " neſs?"

Secondly, as the threatnings of the goſpel are very plain and expreſs, ſo are they likewiſe very dreadful and terrible. I want words to expreſs the leaſt part of the terror of them; and yet the expreſſions of ſcripture concerning the miſery and puniſhment of ſinners in another world, are ſuch as may juſtly raiſe amazement and horror in thoſe that hear them. Sometimes it is expreſt by " a depart- " ing from GOD," and a perpetual baniſhment " from his preſence," who is the foundation of all comfort, and joy, and happineſs; ſometimes " by " the loſs of our ſouls," or our ſelves. " What " ſhall it profit a man to gain the whole world and " loſe his own ſoul?" or, (as it is in another evangeliſt) " to loſe himſelf?" not that our being ſhall be deſtroyed; that would be a happy loſs indeed,

I.

SERM. CXII.

to him that is sentenced to be for ever miserable; but the man shall still remain, and his body and soul continue to be the foundation of his misery, and a scene of perpetual woe and discontent, which our SAVIOUR calls "the destroying of body and soul in "hell," or "going into everlasting punishment, where "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, "where the worm dies not, and the fire is not "quenched." Could I represent to you the horror of that dismal prison, into which wicked and impure souls are to be thrust, and the misery they must there endure, without the least spark of comfort, or glimmering of hope, how they wail and grone under the intolerable wrath of GOD, the insolent scorn and cruelty of devils, the severe lashes and stings, the raging anguish and horrible despair of their own minds, without intermission, without pity, without hope of ever seeing an end of that misery, which yet is unsupportable for one moment; could I represent these things to you according to the terror of them, what effect must they have upon us? and with what patience could any man bear to think of plunging himself into this misery? and by his own wilful fault and folly to endanger his "coming into this place and state of torments?" especially if we consider in the

Third place, that the gospel hath likewise declared, that there is no avoiding of this misery, no hopes of impunity, if men go on and continue in their sins. The terms of the gospel in this are peremptory, that "except we repent, we shall perish;" that "without holiness no man shall see the LORD;" that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the king-"dom of GOD." And this is a very pressing consideration,

SERM. CXII.

sideration, and brings the matter to a short and plain issue. Either we must leave our sins, or die in them; either we must repent of them, or be judged for them; either we must forsake our sins, and break off that wicked course which we have lived in, or we must quit all hopes of heaven and happiness, nay, we cannot "escape the damnation "of hell," The clear revelation of a future judgment is so pressing an argument to repentance, as no man can in reason resist, that hath not a mind to be miserable. "Now (saith St. Paul to the "Athenians) he straightly chargeth all men every "where to repent, because he hath appointed a "day in the which he will judge the world in righ-"teousness."

Men may cheat themselves, or suffer themselves to be deluded by others, about several means and devices of reconciling a wicked life, with the hopes of heaven and eternal salvation; as by mingling some pangs of sorrow for sin, and some hot fits of devotion with a sinful life; which is only the interruption of a wicked course, without reformation and amendment of life: but "let no man deceive you "with vain words;" for our blessed SAVIOUR hath provided no other ways to save men, but upon the terms of repentance and obedience.

Fourthly, this argument takes hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retains its force upon the minds of men, when almost all other considerations fail, and have lost their efficacy upon us. Many men are gone so far in an evil course, that neither shame of their vices, nor the love of GOD and virtue, nor the hopes of heaven are of any force with them, to reclaim them and bring them

SERM. CXII.

to a better mind: but there is one handle yet left, whereby to lay hold of them, and that is their fear. This is a passion that lies deep in our nature, being founded in self-preservation, and sticks so closely to us, that we cannot quit our selves of it, nor shake it off. Men may put off ingenuity, and break thro' all obligations of gratitude. Men may harden their foreheads, and conquer all sense of shame; but they can never perfectly stifle and subdue their fears; they can hardly so extinguish the fear of hell, but that some sparks of that fire will ever and anon be flying about in their consciences, especially when they are made sober, and brought to themselves by affliction, and by the present apprehensions of death, have a nearer sight of another world. And if it was so hard for the heathen to conquer these apprehensions, how much harder must it be to christians, who have so much greater assurance of these things, and to whom "the wrath of God is so clearly revealed from "heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness "of men?"

Fifthly, no religion in the world ever urged this argument upon men, with that force and advantage which christianity does. The philosophy of the heathen gave men no steady assurance of the thing; the most knowing persons among them were not agreed about a future state; the greatest part of them spake but doubtfully concerning another life. And besides the natural jealousies and suspicions of mankind concerning these things, they had only some fair probabilities of reason, and the authority of their poets, who talk'd they knew not what about the elysian fields, and the infernal regions, and the three judges of hell; so that the wisest among them had hardly assurance

assurance enough in themselves of the truth of the thing, to press it upon others with any great confidence, and therefore it was not likely to have any great efficacy upon the generality of mankind. SERM. CXII.

As for the jewish religion; tho' that supposed and took for granted the rewards of another world, as a principle of natural religion; yet in the law of Moses there was no particular and express revelation of the life of the world to come; and what was deduced from it, was by remote and obscure consequence. Temporal promises and threatnings it had many and clear, and their eyes were so dazzled with these, that it is probable that the generality of them did but little consider a future state, till they fell into great temporal calamities under the Grecian and Roman empires, whereby they were almost necessarily awakened to the consideration and hopes of a better life, to relieve them under their present evils and sufferings; and yet even in that time they were divided into two great factions about this matter, the one affirming, and the other as confidently denying any life after this. But "the gospel hath brought "life and immortality to light," as we are assured from heaven of the truth and reality of another state, and a future judgment. The SON of GOD was sent into the world to preach this doctrine, and rose again from the dead, and was taken up into heaven, for a visible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this, and consequently of a future judgment, which no man ever doubted of, that did firmly believe a future state.

The sum of all that I have said is this; the gospel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to salvation is by forsaking our sins, and living a holy

and

SERM. CXII.

and virtuous life; and the most effectual argument in the world to persuade men to this, is the consideration of the infinite danger that a sinful course exposeth men to, since the wrath of God continually hangs over sinners, and if they continue in their sins, will certainly fall upon them, and overwhelm them with misery, and he that is not moved by this argument, is lost to all intents and purposes.

All that now remains, is to urge this argument upon men, and from the serious consideration of it, to persuade them to repent, and reform their wicked lives. And was there ever age wherein this was more needful? when iniquity doth not only abound, but even rage among us; when infidelity and profaneness, and all manner of lewdness and vice appears so boldly and openly, and men commit the greatest abominations without blushing at them; when vice hath got such head that it can hardly bear to be check'd and controll'd, and when, as the Roman historian complains of his times, *ad ea tempora, quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus, perventum est*; "things are come to that pass, that we can "neither bear our vices, nor the remedies of them." Our vices are grown to a prodigious and intolerable height, and yet men hardly have the patience to hear of them; and surely a disease is then dangerous indeed, when it cannot bear the severity that is necessary to a cure. But yet, notwithstanding this, we who are the messengers of God to men, to warn them of their sin and danger, must not keep silence, and spare to tell them both of their sins, and of the judgment of God which hangs over them; that "God will visit for these things," and that "his "soul will be avenged on such a nation as this,"

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at leaſt we may have leave to warn others, who are not yet "run to the ſame exceſs of riot, to ſave "themſelves from this untoward generation." "God's judgments are abroad in the earth," and call aloud upon us, "to learn righteouſneſs." SERM. CXII.

But this is but a ſmall conſideration, in compariſon of the judgment of another world, which we who call our ſelves chriſtians, do profeſs to believe, as one of the chief articles of our faith. The conſideration of this ſhould check and cool us in the heat of all our ſinful pleaſures; and that bitter irony of Solomon ſhould cut us to the heart; "rejoice, O "young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear "thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the "ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine "eyes; but know that for all theſe things God "will bring thee into judgment." Think often and ſeriouſly on that time, wherein "the wrath of "God," which is now "revealed againſt ſin," ſhall be executed upon ſinners; and if we believe this, we are ſtrangely ſtupid and obſtinate, if we be not moved by it. The aſſurance of this made St. Paul extremely importunate in exhorting men to avoid ſo great danger, 2 Cor. v. 10, 11. "We "muſt all appear before the judgment-ſeat of "Christ, that every one may receive the things "done in the body, according to what he hath done, "whether it be good, or evil. Knowing therefore "the terrors of the Lord, we perſuade men." And if this ought to move us to take ſo great a care of others, much more of our ſelves. The judgment to come is a very amazing conſideration, it is a fearful thing to hear of it, but it will be much more terrible to ſee it, eſpecially to thoſe whoſe guilt

SERM. CXII.

guilt must needs make them so heartily concern'd in the dismal consequences of it; and yet as sure as I stand, and you sit here, "this great and terrible "day of the LORD will come, and who may abide "his coming!" what will we do, when that day shall surprize us careless and unprepared! what unspeakable horror and amazement will then take hold of us! when "lifting up our eyes to heaven, we "shall see the SON of man coming in the clouds of it, "with power, and great glory;" when that powerful voice which shall pierce the ears of the dead shall ring through the world, "arise ye dead, and come "to judgment;" when the mighty trumpet shall sound, and wake the sleepers of a thousand years, and summon the dispersed parts of the bodies of all men that ever lived, to rally together and take their place; and the souls and bodies of men which have been so long strangers to one another, shall meet and be united again, to receive the doom due to their deeds; what fear shall then surprize sinners, and how will they tremble at the presence of the great judge, and "for the glory of his majesty!" how will their consciences fly in their faces, and their own hearts condemn them, for their wicked and ungodly lives, and even prevent that sentence which yet shall certainly be past and executed upon them. But I will proceed no further in this argument, which hath so much of terror in it.

I will conclude my sermon, as Solomon doth his Ecclesiastes, chap. xii. 13, 14. "Let us hear the "conclusion of the whole matter; fear GOD, and "keep his commandments, for this is the whole "of man; for GOD shall bring every work "into judgment, and every secret thing, whether "it

"it be good, or whether it be evil." To which I will only add that serious and merciful admonition of "a "greater than Solomon," I mean the great judge of the whole world, our blessed LORD and SAVIOUR, Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36. "Take heed to yourselves, lest "at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeit- "ing, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, "and so that day come upon you at unawares. For "as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on "the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, "and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy "to escape all these things that shall come to pass, "and to stand before the SON of man:" to whom with the FATHER, and the HOLY GHOST, &c.

SERMON CXIII.

Knowledge and practice necessary in religion.

JOHN xiii. 17.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

SERM. CXIII.

TWO things make up religion, the knowledge and the practice of it; and the first is wholly in order to the second; and GOD hath not revealed to us the knowledge of himself and his will, merely for the improvement of our understanding, but for the bettering of our hearts and lives; not to entertain our minds with the speculations of religion and virtue, but to form and govern our actions. "If "ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

I.

SERM. CXIII.

In which words, our bleſſed SAVIOUR does from a particular inſtance take occaſion to ſettle a general concluſion; namely, that religion doth mainly conſiſt in practice, and that the knowledge of his doctrine, without the real effects of it upon our lives, will bring no man to heaven. In the beginning of this chapter our great LORD and maſter, to teſtify his love to his diſciples, and to give them a lively inſtance and example of that great virtue of humility, is pleaſed to condeſcend to a very low and mean office, ſuch as was uſed to be performed by ſervants to their maſters, and not by the maſter to his ſervants; namely, to waſh their feet; and when he had done this, he asks them if they did underſtand the meaning of this ſtrange action. "Know ye what I have "done unto you? ye call me maſter, and LORD, "and ye ſay well, for ſo I am: if I then your "LORD and maſter have waſhed your feet, ye alſo "ought to waſh one anothers feet; for I have "given you an example, that ye ſhould do as I have "done to you. Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, the "ſervant is not greater than the LORD, neither he "that is ſent, greater than he that ſent him; if ye "know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them." As if he had ſaid, this which I have now done, is eaſy to be underſtood, and ſo likewiſe are all thoſe other chriſtian graces and virtues, which I have heretofore by my doctrine and example recommended to you; but it is not enough to know theſe things, but ye muſt likewiſe do them. The end and the life of all our knowledge in religion, is to put in practice what we know. It is neceſſary indeed that we ſhould know our duty, but knowledge alone will never bring us to that happineſs, which religion deſigns to make

SERM. CXIII.

make us partakers of, if our knowledge have not its due and proper influence upon our lives. Nay, ſo far will our knowledge be from making us happy, if it be ſeparated from the virtues of a good life, that it will prove one of the heavieſt aggravations of our miſery; and it is as if he had ſaid, "if ye know "theſe things, wo be unto you, if you do them "not."

From theſe words then, I ſhall obſerve theſe three things, which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to.

Firſt, that the knowledge of GOD's will, and our duty, is neceſſary to the practice of it; "if ye know "theſe things;" which ſuppoſeth that we muſt know our duty, before we can do it.

Secondly, that the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be, and too often are ſeparated. This likewiſe the text ſuppoſeth, that men may know their duty, and yet not do it; and that this is very frequent, which is the reaſon why our SAVIOUR gives this caution.

Thirdly, that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs; "if ye know theſe things, happy "are ye if ye do them." I begin with the

Firſt of theſe, namely, that the knowledge of GOD's will and our duty, is neceſſary in order to the practice of it. The truth of this propoſition is ſo clear and evident at firſt view, that nothing can obſcure it, and bring it in queſtion, but to endeavour to prove it; and therefore inſtead of ſpending time in that, I ſhall take occaſion from it, juſtly to reprove that prepoſterous courſe which is taken, and openly avowed and juſtified by ſome, as the ſafeſt and beſt way to make men religious, and to bring them to

SERM. CXIII.

happineſs; namely, by taking away from them the means of knowledge; as if the beſt way to bring men to do the will of GOD, were to keep men from knowing it. For what elſe can be the meaning of that maxim ſo current in the church of Rome, "that ignorance is the mother of devotion?" or of that ſtrange and injurious practice of theirs of locking up from the people that great ſtore-houſe and treaſury of divine knowledge, "the holy ſcriptures," in an unknown tongue?

I know very well, that in juſtification of this hard uſage of their people, it is pretended that knowledge is apt to puff men up, to make them proud and contentious, refractory and diſobedient, and heretical, and what not? and particularly, that the free and familiar uſe of the holy ſcriptures permitted to the people, hath miniſtred occaſion to the people of falling into great and dangerous errors, and of making great diſturbance and diviſions among chriſtians. For anſwer to this pretence, I deſire theſe four or five things may be conſidered.

Firſt, that unleſs this be the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, there is no force in this reaſon; and if this be the proper and natural effect of this knowledge, then this reaſon will reach a great way farther, than thoſe who make uſe of it are willing it ſhould.

Secondly, that this is not the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from mens abuſe of it; for which the thing itſelf is not to be taken away.

Thirdly, that the proper and natural effects and conſequences of ignorance, are equally pernicious,

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and much more certain and unavoidable, than thoſe which are accidentally occaſion'd by knowledge. SERM. CXIII.

Fourthly, that if this reaſon be good, it is much ſtronger for withholding the ſcriptures from the prieſts and the learned, than from the people.

Fifthly, that this danger was as great, and as well known in the apoſtles times, and yet they took a quite contrary courſe.

Firſt, I deſire it may be conſider'd that unleſs this be the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, there is no force in this reaſon; for that which is neceſſary, or highly uſeful, ought not to be taken away, becauſe it is liable to be perverted, and abuſed to ill purpoſes. If it ought, then not only knowledge in religion, but all other knowledge ought to be reſtrained and ſuppreſs'd; for all knowledge is apt to puff up, and liable to be abuſed to many ill purpoſes. At this rate, light, and liberty, and reaſon, yea and life it ſelf, ought all to be taken away, becauſe they are all greatly abuſed by many men, to ſome ill purpoſes or other, ſo that unleſs theſe ill effects do naturally and neceſſarily ſpring from knowledge in religion, the objection from them is of no force; and if they do neceſſarily flow from it, then this reaſon will reach a great way farther than thoſe that make uſe of it are willing it ſhould; for if this be true, that the knowledge of religion, as it is revealed in the holy ſcriptures, is of its own nature ſo pernicious, as to make men proud and contentious and heretical, and diſobedient to authority, then the blame of all this would fall upon our bleſſed SAVIOUR, for revealing ſo pernicious a doctrine and upon his apoſtles for publiſhing

SERM. CXIII.

liſhing this doctrine in a known tongue to all mankind, and thereby laying the foundation of perpetual ſchiſms and hereſies in the church.

Secondly, but this is not the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from mens abuſe of it, for which the thing it ſelf ought not to be taken away. And thus much certainly they will grant, becauſe it cannot with any face be denied; and if ſo, then the means of knowledge are not to be denied, but only men are to be cautioned not to pervert and abuſe them. And if any man abuſe the holy ſcriptures to the patronizing of error or hereſy, or to any other bad purpoſe, he does it at his peril, and muſt give an account to GOD for it, but ought not to be deprived of the means of knowledge, for fear he ſhould make an ill uſe of them. We muſt not hinder men from being chriſtians, to preſerve them from being hereticks; and put out mens eyes, for fear they ſhould ſome time or other take upon them to diſpute their way with their guides.

I remember that St. Paul, 1 Cor. viii. 1. takes notice of this accidental inconvenience of knowledge, that it puffeth up, and that this pride occaſioned great contentions and diviſions among them: but the remedy which he preſcribes againſt this miſchief of knowledge is not to withhold from men the means of it, and to celebrate the ſervice of GOD, the prayers of the church, and the reading of the ſcriptures in an unknown tongue, but quite contrary, chap. xiv. of that epiſtle, he ſtrictly enjoins that the ſervice of GOD in the church be ſo performed, as may be for the edification of the people; which he ſays cannot be, if it be celebrated in an unknown

unknown tongue; and the remedy he preſcribes againſt the accidental miſchief and incovenience of knowledge, is not ignorance, but charity, to govern their knowledge, and to help them to make right uſe of it; ver. 20. of that chap. after he had declared that the ſervice of GOD ought to be performed in a known tongue, he immediately adds, "brethren, be not children in underſtanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, "but in underſtanding be ye men." He commends knowledge, he encourageth it, he requires it of all chriſtians; ſo far is he from checking the purſuit of it, and depriving the people of the means of it. And indeed there is nothing in the chriſtian religion, but what is fit for every man to know, becauſe there is nothing in it, but what is deſigned to promote holineſs and a good life; and if men make any other uſe of their knowledge, it is their own fault, for it certainly tends to make men good; and being ſo uſeful and neceſſary to ſo good a purpoſe, men ought not to be debarr'd of it. SERM. CXIII.

Thirdly, let it be conſider'd, that the proper and natural effects and conſequences of ignorance are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than thoſe which are accidentally occaſioned by knowledge; for ſo far as a man is ignorant of his duty, it is impoſſible he ſhould do it. He that hath the knowledge of religion, may be a bad chriſtian, but he that is deſtitute of it, can be none at all. Or if ignorance do beget and promote ſome kind of devotion in men, it is ſuch a devotion as is not properly religion, but ſuperſtition; the ignorant man may be zealouſly ſuperſtitious, but without ſome meaſure of knowledge, no man can be truly

SERM. CXIII.

truly religious. "That the soul be without knowledge it is not good," says Solomon, Prov. xix. 2. because good practices depend upon our knowledge, and must be directed by it; when as a man that is trained up only to the outward performance of some things in religion, as to the saying over so many prayers in an unknown tongue, this man cannot be truly religious, because nothing is religious, that is not a reasonable service; and no service can be reasonable, that is not directed by our understanding. Indeed, if the end of prayer were only to give God to understand what we want, it were all one what language we prayed in, and whether we understood what we asked of him or not: but so long as the end of prayer is to testify the sense of our own wants, and of our dependence upon God for the supply of them, it is impossible that any man should in any tolerable propriety of speech be said to pray, who does not understand what he asks; and the saying over so many *pater nosters* by one that does not understand the meaning of them, is no more a prayer, than the repeating over so many verses in Virgil. And if this were good reasoning, that men must not be permitted to know so much as they can in religion, for fear they should grow troublesome with their knowledge, then certainly the best way in the world to maintain peace in the christian church, would be to let the people know nothing at all in religion; and the best way to secure the ignorance of the people would be to keep the priests as ignorant as the people, and then to be sure they could teach them nothing: but then the mischief would be, that out of a fondness to maintain peace in the christian church, there would be no church, nor no christianity;

chriſtianity; which would be the ſame wiſe contri- SERM. CXIII.
vance, as if a prince ſhould deſtroy his ſubjects, to keep his kingdom quiet.

Fourthly, let us likewiſe conſider, that if this reaſon be good, it is much ſtronger for withholding the ſcriptures from the prieſts, and the learned, than from the people; becauſe the danger of ſtarting errors and hereſies, and countenancing them from ſcripture, and managing them plauſibly and with advantage, is much more to be feared from the learned, than from the common people; and the experience of all ages hath ſhewn, that the great broachers and abetters of hereſy in the chriſtian church, have been men of learning and wit; and moſt of the famous hereſies, that are recorded in eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, have their names from ſome learned man or other; ſo that it is a great miſtake to think that the way to prevent error and hereſy in the church, is to take the bible out of the hands of the people, ſo long as the free uſe of it is permitted to men of learning and skill, in whoſe hands the danger of perverting it is much greater. The ancient fathers, I am ſure, do frequently preſcribe to the people the conſtant and careful reading of the holy ſcriptures, as the ſureſt antidote againſt the poiſon of dangerous errors, and damnable hereſies; and if there be ſo much danger of ſeduction into error from the oracles of truth, by what other or better means can we hope to be ſecured againſt this danger? if the word of GOD be ſo croſs and improper a means to this end, one would think that the teachings of men ſhould be much leſs effectual; ſo that men muſt either be left in their ignorance, or they muſt be permitted to learn from the word of truth; and whatever

SERM. CXIII.

force this reaſon of the danger of hereſy hath in it, to deprive the common people of the uſe of the ſcriptures, I am ſure it is much ſtronger to wreſt them out of the hands of the prieſts and the learned, becauſe they are much more capable of perverting them to ſo bad a purpoſe.

Fifthly, and laſtly, this danger was as great and viſible in the age of the apoſtles, as it is now; and yet they took a quite contrary courſe: there were hereſies then, as well as now, and either the ſcriptures were not thought by being in the hands of the people to be the cauſe of them, or they did not think the taking of them out of their hands a proper remedy. The apoſtles in all their epiſtles, do earneſtly exhort the people "to grow in knowledge," and commend them for "ſearching the ſcriptures", and charge them that "the word of GOD ſhould dwell "richly in them." And St. Peter takes particular notice of ſome men wreſting ſome difficult paſſages in St. Paul's epiſtles, as likewiſe in the other ſcriptures, to their own deſtruction, 2 Pet. iii. 16. where ſpeaking of St. Paul's epiſtles, he ſays, "there are "ſome things hard to be underſtood, which they "that are unlearned and unſtable wreſt, as they do "alſo the other ſcriptures, to their own deſtruction." Here the danger objected is taken notice of; but the remedy preſcribed by St. Peter, is not to take from the people the uſe of the ſcriptures, and to keep them in ignorance; but after he had cautioned againſt the like weakneſs and errors, he exhorts them to "grow in knowledge," ver. 17, 18. "ye there-"fore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things before" (that is, ſeeing ye are ſo plainly told and warned of this danger) "beware leſt ye alſo being led away

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" with the error of the wicked, fall from your own " ſtedfaſtneſs; but grow in grace, and in the know- " ledge of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS " CHRIST," (that is, of the chriſtian religion;) believing, it ſeems, that the more knowledge they had in religion, the leſs they would be in danger of falling into damnable errors. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, viz. that the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may and often are ſeparated. This likewiſe is ſuppoſed in the text, that men may, and often do know the will of GOD, and their duty, and yet fail in the practice of it. Our SAVIOUR elſewhere ſuppoſeth, that many " know " their maſter's will, who do not do it;" and he compares thoſe " that hear his ſayings, and do them " not, to a fooliſh man that built his houſe upon " the ſand." And St. James ſpeaks of ſome, " who " are hearers of the word only, but not doers of it," and for that reaſon fall ſhort of happineſs. And this is no wonder, becauſe the attaining to that knowledge of religion which is neceſſary to ſalvation is no difficult task. A great part of it is written in our hearts, and we cannot be ignorant of it if we would; as that there is a GOD, and a providence, and another ſtate after this life, wherein we ſhall be rewarded, or puniſhed, according as we have lived here in this world; that GOD is to be worſhipped, to be prayed to for what we want, and to be praiſed for what we enjoy. Thus far nature inſtructs men in religion, and in the great duties of morality, as juſtice, and temperance, and the like. And as for revealed religion, as that JESUS CHRIST the SON of GOD came in our nature to ſave us, by revealing our duty more clearly and fully to us, by giving us a

SERM. CXIII.

more perfect example of holiness and obedience in his own life and conversation, and by dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification; these are things which men may easily understand; and yet for all that they are difficultly brought to the practice of religion.

I shall instance in three sorts of persons, in whom the knowledge of religion is more remarkably separated from the practice of it; and for distinction sake, I may call them by these three names; the speculative, the formal, and the hypocritical christian. The first of these makes religion only a science, the second takes it up for a fashion, the third makes some worldly advantage of it, and serves some secular interest and design by it. All these are upon several accounts concerned to understand something of religion; but yet will not be brought to the practice of it.

The first of these, whom I call the speculative christian, is he who makes religion only a science, and studies it as a piece of learning, and part of that general knowledge in which he affects the reputation of being a master; he hath no design to practise it, but he is loth to be ignorant of it, because the knowledge of it is a good ornament of conversation, and will serve for discourse and entertainment among those who are disposed to be grave and serious; and because he does not intend to practise it, he passeth over those things which are plain and easy to be understood, and applies himself chiefly to the consideration of those things which are more abstruse, and will afford matter of controversy and subtle dispute, as the doctrine of the trinity, predestination, free-will, and the like. Of this temper seem many of the schoolmen of old to have been, who made it their great study and business to puzzle religion, and to make

SERM. CXIII.

make every thing in it intricate, by ſtarting infinite queſtions and difficulties about the plaineſt truths; and of the ſame rank uſually are the heads and leaders of parties and factions in religion, who by needleſs controverſies, and endleſs diſputes about ſome thing or other, commonly of no great moment in religion, hinder themſelves and others from minding the practice of the great and ſubſtantial duties of a good life.

Secondly, there is the formal chriſtian, who takes up religion for a faſhion. He is born and bred in a nation where chriſtianity is profeſt, and countenanced, and therefore thinks it convenient for him to know ſomething of it. Of this ſort there are, I fear, a great many, who read the ſcriptures ſometimes as others do, to know the hiſtory of it; and go to church, and hear the goſpel preached, and by this means come in ſome meaſure to underſtand the hiſtory of our SAVIOUR, and the chriſtian doctrine; but do not at all bend themſelves to comply with the great end and deſign of it; they do not heartily endeavour to form and faſhion their lives according to the laws and precepts of it; they think they are very good chriſtians, if they can give an account of the articles of their faith, profeſs their belief in GOD and CHRIST, and declare that they hope to be ſaved by him, tho' they take no care to keep his commandments. Theſe are they of whom our SAVIOUR ſpeaks, Luke vi. 46. "who call him LORD, "LORD, but do not the things which he ſaid."

Thirdly, hypocritical chriſtians, who make an intereſt of religion, and ſerve ſome worldly deſign by it. Theſe are concerned to underſtand religion more than ordinary, that they may counterfeit it handſomly, and may not be at a loſs when they have occaſion

SERM. CXIII.

caſion to put on the garb of it. And this is one part of the character which the apoſtle gives of thoſe perſons, who he foretels would appear in the laſt days, 2 Tim. iii. 2. he ſays they ſhould be "lo-"vers of their own ſelves, covetous, heady, high-"minded, lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of "GOD, having a form of godlineſs, but denying "the power of it."

Now theſe men do not love religion, but they have occaſion to make uſe of it; and therefore they will have no more of it than will juſt ſerve their purpoſe and deſign. And indeed he that hath any other deſign in religion than to pleaſe GOD, and ſave his ſoul, needs no more than ſo much knowledge of it, as will ſerve him to act a part in it upon occaſion. I come to the

Third and laſt obſervation, viz. that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs; "if ye "know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them;" not "if ye know theſe things happy are ye;" but "if ye know and do them." Now to convince men of ſo important a truth, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe two things:

Firſt, that the goſpel makes the practice of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs.

Secondly, that the nature and reaſon of the thing makes it a neceſſary qualification for it.

Firſt, the goſpel make the practice of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs. Our SAVIOUR in his firſt ſermon, where he repeats the promiſe of bleſſedneſs ſo often, makes no promiſe of it to the mere knowledge of religion, but to the habit and practice of chriſtian graces and virtues, of meek-

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neſs, and humility, and mercifulneſs, and righteouſneſs, and peaceableneſs, and purity, and patience under ſufferings and perſecutions for righteouſneſs ſake. And Matth. vii. 21. our SAVIOUR doth moſt fully declare, that the happineſs which he promiſes, did not belong to thoſe who made profeſſion of his name, and were ſo well acquainted with his doctrine, as to be able to inſtruct others, if themſelves in the mean time did not practiſe it; "not every one "that ſaith unto me, LORD, LORD, ſhall enter into "the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the "will of my FATHER which is in heaven. Many "will ſay unto me in that day, LORD, LORD, "have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy "name caſt out devils, and done many wondrous "works? and then will I profeſs unto them, I never "knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniqui-"ty." Tho' they profeſs to know him, yet becauſe their lives were not anſwerable to the knowledge which they had of him, and his doctrine, he declares that "he will not know them," but bids them "depart from him." And then he goes on to ſhew, that tho' a man attend to the doctrine of CHRIST, and gain the knowledge of it; yet if it do not deſcend into his life, and govern his actions, all that man's hopes of heaven are fond and groundleſs; and only that man's hopes of heaven are well-grounded, who knows the doctrine of CHRIST, and does it, ver. 24. "whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth "them, I will liken him to a wiſe man, who built "his houſe upon a rock, and the rain deſcended, "and the floods came, and the winds blew, and "beat upon that houſe, and it fell not, for it was "founded upon a rock; and every one that hear-

SERM. CXIII.

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SERM. CXIII.

" eth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, " ſhall be liken'd to a fooliſh man, who built his " houſe upon the ſand, and the rain deſcended, and " the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon " that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Tho' a man had a knowledge of religion as great and perfect as that which Solomon had of natural things, " large as the ſand upon the ſea- " ſhore ;" yet all this knowledge, ſeparated from practice, would be like the ſand alſo in another reſpect, a weak foundation for any man to build his hopes of happineſs upon.

To the ſame purpoſe St. Paul ſpeaks, Rom. ii. 13. " not the hearers of the law are juſt before " GOD ; but the doers of the law ſhall be juſtified." So likewiſe St. James, chap. i. 22. " Be ye doers of " the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your " own ſelves ;" and ver. 25. " Whoſo looketh into " the perfect law of liberty " (that is, the law or doctrine of the goſpel) " and continueth therein, he " being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, " this man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed ;" and therefore he adds, that the truth and reality of religion are to be meaſured by the effects of it, in the government of our words, and ordering of our lives, ver. 26. " If any man among you ſeem to be religious, " and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own " heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure reli- " gion, and undefiled before GOD and the FA- " THER is this ; to viſit the fatherleſs and widow " in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted " from the world." Men talk of religion, and keep a great ſtir about it ; but nothing will paſs for true religion before GOD, but the virtuous and charitable

charitable actions of a good life; and GOD will ac- SERM.
cept no man to eternal life upon any other condi- CXIII.
tion. So the apoſtle tells us moſt expreſly, Heb. xii. 14. "Follow peace with all men, and holineſs, "without which no man ſhall ſee the LORD."

Secondly, as GOD hath made the practice of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs, ſo the very nature and reaſon of the thing makes it a neceſſary qualification for it. It is neceſſary that we become like to GOD, in order to the enjoyment of him; and nothing makes us like to GOD, but the practice of holineſs and goodneſs. Knowledge indeed is a divine perfection; but that alone, as it doth not render a man like GOD, ſo neither doth it diſpoſe him for the enjoyment of him. If a man had the underſtanding of an angel, he might for all that be a devil; "he that committeth ſin is of the devil," and whatever knowledge ſuch a man may have, he is of a deviliſh temper and diſpoſition: "but every "one that doth righteouſneſs is born of GOD." By this we are like GOD, and only by our likeneſs to him, do we become capable of the ſight and enjoyment of him; therefore every man that hopes to be happy by the bleſſed ſight of GOD in the next life, muſt endeavour after holineſs in this life. So the ſame apoſtle tells us, 1 John iii. 3. "every man "that hath this hope in him purifieth himſelf, even "as he is pure." A wicked temper and diſpoſition of mind is, in the very nature of the thing, utterly inconſiſtent with all reaſonable hopes of heaven.

Thus I have ſhewn that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs.

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SERM. CXIII.

And now the proper inference from all this is, to put men upon the careful practice of religion. Let no man content himself with the knowledge of his duty, unless he do it; and to this purpose I shall briefly urge these three considerations.

First, this is the great end of all our knowledge in religion, to practise what we know. The knowledge of GOD and of our duty hath so essential a respect to practice, that the scripture will hardly allow it to be properly called knowledge, unless it have an influence upon our lives. 1 John ii. 3, 4. "Hereby we know that we know him, if we "keep his commandments. He that saith I know "him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a "liar, and the truth is not in him."

Secondly, practice is the best way to increase and perfect our knowledge. Knowledge directs us in our practice, but practice confirms and increaseth our knowledge, John vii. 17. "If a man will do the "will of GOD, he shall know of the doctrine." The best way to know GOD, is to be like him our selves, and to have the lively image of his perfections imprinted upon our souls; and the best way to understand the christian religion, is seriously to set about the practice of it; this will give a man a better notion of christianity, than any speculation can.

Thirdly, without the practice of religion, our knowledge will be so far from being any furtherance and advantage to our happiness, that it will be one of the unhappiest aggravations of our misery. He that is ignorant of his duty, hath some excuse to pretend for himself: but he that understands the christian religion, and does not live according to it, hath no cloke for his sin. The defects of our knowledge,

ledge, unless they be gross and wilful, will find an easy pardon with GOD: but the faults of our lives shall be severely punish'd, when we know our duty and would not do it. I will conclude with that of our SAVIOUR, Luke xii. 47, 48. "That servant "which knew his LORD's will, and prepared not "himself, neither did according to his will, shall "be beaten with many stripes; for unto whomsoe-"ver much is given, of him much shall be requi-"red." When we come into the other world, no consideration will sting us more, and add more to the rage of our torments than this, that we did wickedly, when we understood to have done better; and chose to make our selves miserable, when we knew so well the way to have been happy.

SERMON CXIV.

Practice in religion necessary, in proportion to our knowledge.

LUKE xii. 47, 48.

And that servant which knew his LORD's *will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

IN prosecution of the argument which I handled in my last discourse, namely, that the knowledge of our duty, without the practice of it, will SERM. CXIV.

SERM. CXIV.

not bring us to happineſs, I ſhall proceed to ſhew, that if our practice be not anſwerable to our knowledge, this will be a great aggravation both of our ſin and puniſhment.

And to this purpoſe, I have pitched upon theſe words of our LORD, which are the application of two parables, which he had delivered before, to ſtir up men to a diligent and careful practice of their duty, that ſo they may be in a continual readineſs and preparation for the coming of their LORD. The firſt parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are repreſented as ſo many ſervants in a great family, from which the LORD is abſent, and they being uncertain of the time of his return, ſhould always be in a condition and poſture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, Peter enquires of our SAVIOUR, whether he intended this only for his diſciples, or for all? To which queſtion our SAVIOUR returns an anſwer in another parable, which more particularly concerned them; who becauſe they were to be the chief rulers and governors of his church, are repreſented by the ſtewards of a great family, ver. 42. "who "then is that faithful and wiſe ſteward, whom his "LORD ſhall make ruler over his houſhold, to "give them their portion of meat in due ſeaſon?" If he diſcharge his duty, "bleſſed is he," but if he ſhall take occaſion in his LORD's abſence, to domineer over his fellow-ſervants, and riotouſly to waſte his LORD's goods, his LORD when he comes will puniſh him after a more ſevere and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole, in the words of the text, "and that ſervant which "knew

SERM. CXIV.

" knew his lord's will and prepared not himſelf, " neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten " with many ſtripes." As if he had ſaid, and well may ſuch a ſervant deſerve ſo ſevere a puniſhment, who having ſuch a truſt committed to him, and knowing his lord's will ſo much better, yet does contrary to it; upon which our SAVIOUR takes occaſion to compare the fault and puniſhment of thoſe who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with thoſe who are ignorant of it; " that ſervant which knew his lord's will, and " prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, " ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: but he that " knew not, but did commit things worthy of " ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes." And then he adds the reaſon and the equity of this proceeding, " for unto whomſoever much is given, of " him ſhall be much required; and to whom men " have committed much, of him they will ask the " more."

The words in general do allude to that law of the Jews, mentioned Deut. xxv. 2. where the judge is required to ſee the malefactor puniſh'd according to his fault, by a certain number of ſtripes; in relation to which known law among the Jews, our SAVIOUR here ſays, that " thoſe who knew their " lord's will, and did it not, ſhould be beaten with " many ſtripes: but thoſe who knew it not, ſhould " be beaten with few ſtripes." So that there are two obſervations lie plainly before us in the words.

Firſt, that the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing his duty, if he do it not, the greater will be his condemnation; " the " ſervant which knew his lord's will, and prepared

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SERM. CXIV.

" not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be " beaten with many ſtripes."

Secondly, that ignorance is a great excuſe of mens faults, and will leſſen their puniſhment; " but he " that knew not, but did commit things worthy of " ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes."

I ſhall begin with the latter of theſe firſt, becauſe it will make way for the other; viz. that ignorance is a great excuſe of mens faults, and will leſſen their puniſhment; " he that knew not, but " did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be " beaten with few ſtripes."

For the clearing of this, it will be requiſite to conſider what ignorance it is which our SAVIOUR here ſpeaks of; and this is neceſſary to be enquired into, becauſe it is certain that there is ſome ſort of ignorance which doth wholly excuſe and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another ſort, which doth either not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, ſo that it muſt be a third ſort, different from both theſe, which our SAVIOUR here means.

Firſt, there is an ignorance which doth wholly excuſe and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is an abſolute and invincible ignorance, when a perſon is wholly ignorant of the thing, which if he knew, he ſhould be bound to do, but neither can nor could have help'd it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, he either had not the capacity, or wanted the means and opportunity of knowing it. In this caſe a perſon is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For GOD meaſures the faults of men by their wills, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt,

guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conſcious to himſelf that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do. Now if a man be ſimply and invincibly ignorant of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether involuntary; for the will hath nothing to do, where the underſtanding doth not firſt direct. And this is the caſe of children who are not yet come to the uſe of reaſon; for tho' they may do that which is materially a fault, yet it is none in them, becauſe by reaſon of their incapacity, they are at preſent invincibly ignorant of what they ought to do. And this is the caſe likewiſe of idiots, who are under a natural incapacity of knowledge, and ſo far as they are ſo, nothing that they do is imputed to them as a fault. The ſame may be ſaid of diſtracted perſons, who are deprived either wholly, or at ſome times, of the uſe of their underſtandings: ſo far, and ſo long as they are thus deprived, they are free from all guilt; and to perſons who have the free and perfect uſe of their reaſon, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are abſolutely and invincibly ignorant. For inſtance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind, to believe in the SON of GOD, where he is ſufficiently manifeſted and revealed to them; but thoſe who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, ſhall not be condemned for this infidelity, becauſe it is impoſſible they ſhould "believe "on him, of whom they never heard;" they may indeed be condemned upon other accounts, for ſinning againſt the light of nature, and for not obeying "the law which was written in their hearts;" for what the apoſtle ſays of the revelation of the law,

SERM. CXIV.

SERM. CXIV.

law, is as true of any other revelation of GOD, "as "many as have sinned without law, shall also perish "without law; and as many as have sinned under "the law, shall be judged by the law," Rom. ii. 12. In like manner, those who have sinned without the gospel, (that is, who never had the knowledge of it) shall not be condemned for any offence against that revelation which was never made to them, but for their violation of the law of nature; only they that have sinned under the gospel, shall be judged by it.

Secondly, there is likewise another sort of ignorance, which either does not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, when men are not only ignorant, but choose to be so; that is, when they wilfully neglect those means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; such as Job speaks of, Job xxi. 14. "who say unto GOD de-"part from us, for we desire not the knowledge of "thy ways." And this sort of ignorance many among the Jews were guilty of, when our SAVIOUR came and preached to them, but they would not be instructed by him; "the light came among them, "but they loved darkness rather than light," as he himself says of them; and as he says elsewhere of the pharisees, "they rejected the counsel of GOD "against themselves," they wilfully shut their eyes against that light which offered it self to them; "they "would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their "ears, nor understand with their hearts, that they "might be converted, and healed." Now an ignorance in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuse at all in it. He that knew not his lord's will, because he would not know it, because he wilfully rejected the means of coming to

to the knowledge of it, deſerves to be beaten with as many ſtripes, as if he had known it; becauſe he might have known it, and would not. He that will not take notice of the king's proclamation, or will ſtop his ears when it is read, and afterwards offends againſt it, does equally deſerve puniſhment with thoſe who have read it, and heard it; and diſobey'd it; becauſe he was as groſly faulty in not knowing it; and there is no reaſon that any man's groſs fault ſhould be his excuſe. SERM. CXIV.

So that it is neither of theſe ſorts of ignorance that our SAVIOUR means, neither abſolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is groſly wilful and affected; for the firſt, men deſerve not to be beaten at all, becauſe they cannot help it; for the latter, they deſerve not to be excuſed, becauſe they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our SAVIOUR here ſpeaks of ſuch an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuſe it; for he ſays of them, that "they knew not their lord's will," and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuſe them from blame, nor exempt them from puniſhment, "but "they ſhould be beaten with few ſtripes." In the

Third place then, there is an ignorance which is in ſome degree faulty, and yet does in a great meaſure excuſe the faults which proceed from it; and this is when men are not abſolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in compariſon of others, who have a far more clear and diſtinct knowledge of it; and though they do not groſly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet perhaps they

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SERM. CXIV.

do not make the beſt uſe they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better; and therefore in compariſon of others, who have far better means and advantages of knowing their lord's will, they may be ſaid not to know it, tho' they are not ſimply ignorant of it, but only have a more obſcure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance does in a great meaſure excuſe ſuch perſons, and extenuate their crimes, in compariſon of thoſe who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their maſter's will; and yet it does not free them from all guilt; becauſe they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had; and perhaps if they had uſed more care and induſtry, they might have known their lord's will better. And this was the caſe of the heathens, who in compariſon of thoſe who enjoyed the light of the goſpel, might be ſaid not to have known their lord's will, tho' as to many parts of their duty, they had ſome directions from natural light, and their conſciences did urge them to many things by the obſcure apprehenſions and hopes of a future reward, and the fear of a future puniſhment. But this was but a very obſcure and uncertain knowledge, in compariſon of the clear light of the goſpel, which hath diſcovered to us our duty ſo plainly by the laws and precepts of it, and hath preſented us with ſuch powerful motives and arguments to obedience in the promiſes and threatnings of it. And this likewiſe is the caſe of many chriſtians; who either through the natural flowneſs of their underſtandings, or by the neglect of their parents and teachers, or other circumſtances of their education, have had far leſs means and advantages of knowledge than others. God does not expect ſo much

much from thoſe as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity, and advantages of knowledge; and when our LORD ſhall come to call his ſervants to an account, they ſhall be beaten with fewer ſtripes than others; they ſhall not wholly eſcape, becauſe they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had leſs knowledge than others, by ſo much their puniſhment ſhall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it ſhould be ſo, that men ſhould be accountable according to what they have received, and that to whom leſs is given, leſs ſhould be required at their hands. The ſcripture hath told us, "that GOD will judge the "world in righteouſneſs;" now juſtice does require, that in taxing the puniſhment of offenders, every thing ſhould be conſidered, that may be a juſt excuſe and extenuation of their crimes, and that accordingly their puniſhment ſhould be abated. Now the greateſt extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; ſo that ſo far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, ſo far he is excuſable for the neglect of it: for every degree of ignorance takes off ſo much from the perverſeneſs of the will; *& nihil ardet in inferno, niſi propria voluntas*, "Nothing is puniſh'd in hell, but what is "voluntary, and proceeds from our wills."

I do not intend this diſcourſe for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is much more deſirable, if we uſe it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault; if we be not wanting to ourſelves, we may be much happier by our knowledge, than any man can be by his ignorance;

SERM. CXIV.

for tho' ignorance may plead an excuſe, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuſe, than to have the beſt in the world ready at hand to plead for ourſelves. Beſides, that we may do well to conſider, that ignorance is no where an excuſe where it is cheriſh'd; ſo that it would be the vaineſt thing in the world for any man to foſter it, in hopes thereby to excuſe himſelf; for where it is wilful and choſen, it is a fault, and (as I ſaid before) it is the moſt unreaſonable thing in the world, that any man's fault ſhould prove his excuſe. So that this can be no encouragement to ignorance, to ſay that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them, whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is deſigned and choſen, it is wilful; and then no man can reaſonably deſign to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuſe for his faults, becauſe then the ignorance is wilful, and whenever it is ſo, it ceaſeth to be an excuſe.

I the rather ſpeak this, becauſe ignorance hath had the good fortune to meet with great patrons in the world, and to be extoll'd, tho' not upon this account, yet upon another, for which there is leſs pretence of reaſon; as if it were the mother of devotion. Of ſuperſtition I grant it is, and of this we ſee plentiful proof, among thoſe who are ſo careful to preſerve and cheriſh it: but that true piety and devotion ſhould ſpring from it, is as unlikely as that darkneſs ſhould produce light. I do hope indeed, and charitably believe, that the ignorance in which ſome are detained by their teachers and governors, will be a real excuſe, to as many of them as are otherwiſe honeſt and ſincere; but I doubt not but the errors and faults

which

which proceed from this ignorance, will lie heavy upon thoſe who keep them in it. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, that the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of GOD, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. "The ſervant "which knew his lord's will, and prepared not "himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be "beaten with many ſtripes." "Which knew his "lord's will, and prepared not himſelf;" the preparation of our mind to do the will of GOD, whenever there is occaſion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him; a will rightly diſpoſed to obey GOD, tho' it be not brought into act, for want of opportunity, does not loſe its reward: but when, notwithſtanding we know our lord's will, there are neither of theſe, neither the act, nor the preparation and reſolution of doing it, what puniſhment may we not expect?

The juſt GOD, in puniſhing the ſins of men, proportions the puniſhment to the crime, and where the crime is greater, the puniſhment riſeth; as amongſt the Jews, where the crime is ſmall, the malefactor was ſentenced to "a few ſtripes;" where it was great, he was "beaten with many." Thus our SAVIOUR repreſents the great judge of the world dealing with ſinners; according as their ſins are aggravated, he will add to their puniſhment. Now after all the aggravations of ſin, there is none that doth more intrinſically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed againſt the clear knowledge of our duty, and that upon theſe three accounts.

Firſt,

SERM. CXIV.

First, because the knowledge of GOD's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it.

Secondly, because it is a great obligation upon us to the doing of it.

Thirdly, because the neglect of our duty in this case cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. I shall speak briefly to these three.

First, because the knowledge of GOD's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage of doing our duty, is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reason which our SAVIOUR adds here in the text, "for "to whomsoever much is given, of them much "will be required; and to whom men have com- "mitted much, of him they will ask the more." It was, no doubt, a great discouragement and disadvantage to the heathens, that they were so doubtful concerning the will of GOD, and in many cases left to the uncertainty of their own reason, by what way and means they might best apply themselves to the pleasing of him, and this discouraged several of the wisest of them from all serious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing, as to be mistaken about it. Others that were more naturally devout, and could not satisfy their consciences without some expressions of religion, fell into various superstitions, and were ready to embrace any way of worship which custom prescribed, or the fancies of men could suggest to them; and hence sprang all the stupid and barbarous idolatries of the heathens. For ignorance growing upon the world, that natural propension which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worship of a deity, for want of certain direction, exprest it self in those foolish and abominable idolatries, which were practised among the heathens.

And

SERM. CXIV.

And is it not then a mighty advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of divine revelation? we have the will of GOD plainly discovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined, so that no man that is in any measure free from interest and prejudice, can easily mistake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of GOD plainly revealed to us, and such a character of him given, as is most suitable to our natural conceptions of a deity, as render him both awful and amiable; for the scripture represents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of sin, and a great lover of mankind; and we have the law and manner of his worship (so far as was needful) and the rules of a good life clearly expreſt and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience of those laws, a plain discovery made to us of the endless rewards and punishments of another world. And is not this a mighty advantage to the doing of GOD's will, to have it so plainly declared to us, and so powerfully enforced upon us? so that our duty lies plainly before us; we see what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it; so that considering the advantage we have of doing GOD's will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcusable if we do it not.

Secondly, the knowledge of our LORD's will is likewise a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reason to oblige us more to do any thing, than to be fully assur'd that it is the will of GOD, and that it is the law of the great sovereign of the world, who is able to save, or to destroy? that it is the pleasure of him that made us,

and

SERM. CXIV.

and who hath declared that he deſigns to make us happy, by our obedience to his laws? ſo that if we know theſe things to be the will of GOD, we have the greateſt obligation to do them, whether we conſider the authority of GOD, or our own intereſt, and if we neglect them, we have nothing to ſay in our own excuſe. We know the law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it, and if after this we will tranſgreſs, there is no apology to be made for us. They have ſomething to plead for themſelves, who can ſay, that tho' they had ſome apprehenſion of ſome parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do ſome things, yet the different apprehenſions of mankind about ſeveral of theſe things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them eaſy to be carried off from their duty, by the vicious inclinations of their own nature, and the tyranny of cuſtom and example, and the pleaſant temptations of fleſh and blood; but had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from GOD, and had certainly known theſe things to be his will, this would have conquered and born down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or if it had not, would have ſtopt their mouths, and taken away all excuſe from them. There is ſome colour in this plea, that in many caſes they did not know certainly what the will of GOD was, but for us who own a clear revelation from GOD, and profeſs to believe it, what can we ſay for our ſelves, to mitigate the ſeverity of GOD towards us; why he ſhould not pour forth all his wrath, and execute upon us the fierceneſs of his anger?

Thirdly,

SERM. CXIV.

Thirdly, the neglect of GOD's will when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulneſs and contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is ſolely in our wills, and the more wilful any ſin is, the more heinouſly wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than if it proceed from meer obſtinacy and perverſeneſs; and if we know it to be our LORD's will, and do it not, we are guilty of the higheſt contempt of the greateſt authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a ſmall aggravation, to affront the great ſovereign judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and deſpiſe them, when we know whoſe laws they are? "will we provoke the LORD to jealouſy? are we "ſtronger than he?" we believe that it is GOD who ſaid, "thou ſhalt not commit adultery; thou ſhalt "not ſteal; thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs againſt "thy neighbour; thou ſhalt not hate, or oppreſs, "or defraud thy brother in any thing; but thou "ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf;" and will we notwithſtanding venture to break theſe laws, knowing whoſe authority they are ſtampt withal? after this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? what can we ſay for our ſelves, why any one of thoſe many ſtripes which are threatned ſhould be abated to us? *Ignoſci aliquatenus ignorantiæ poteſt*; *contemptus veniam non habet*; "ſomething "may be pardoned to ignorance; but contempt "can expect no forgiveneſs." He that ſtrikes his prince, not knowing him to be ſo, hath ſomething to ſay for himſelf, that tho' he did a diſloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a diſloyal mind: but he

SERM. CXIV.

he that firſt acknowledgeth him for his prince, and then affronts him, deſerves to be proſecuted with the utmoſt ſeverity, becauſe he did it wilfully, and in meer contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it is the will of GOD which we go againſt, takes away all poſſible excuſe from us; for nothing can be ſaid, why we ſhould offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to deſtroy us.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, repreſented to you the true ground and reaſon of the aggravation of thoſe ſins, which are committed againſt the clear knowledge of GOD's will, and our duty; becauſe this knowledge is ſo great an advantage to the doing of our duty; ſo great an obligation upon us to it; and becauſe the neglect of our LORD's will in this caſe, cannot be without great wilfulneſs, and a downright contempt of his authority.

And ſhall I now need to tell you, how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our LORD's will, and to prepare our ſelves to do according to it; to be always in a readineſs and diſpoſition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occaſion and opportunity? and it concerns us the more, becauſe we, in this age and nation, have ſo many advantages, above a great part of the world, of coming to the knowledge of our duty. We enjoy the cleareſt and moſt perfect revelation which GOD ever made of his will to mankind, and have the light of divine truth plentifully ſhed amongſt us, by the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, which is not a ſealed book to us, but lies open to be read, and ſtudied by us; this ſpiritual food is "rained

"down

" down like manna round about our tents," and every one may gather ſo much as is ſufficient; we are not ſtinted; nor have the word of GOD given out to us in broken pieces, or mix'd and adulterated, here a leſſon of ſcripture, and there a legend; but whole and entire, ſincere and uncorrupt.

GOD hath not left us, as he did the heathens for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light; nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the Jews, in dark types and ſhadows: but hath made a clear diſcovery of his mind and will to us. The diſpenſation which we are under, hath no veil upon it, " the darkneſs is paſt, " and the true light now ſhineth; we are of the " day, and of the light," and therefore it may juſtly be expected that we ſhould " put off the works " of darkneſs, and walk as children of the light." Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the ſins committed againſt it, and when our LORD comes to paſs ſentence upon us, will add to the number of our ſtripes. Nay, if GOD ſhould inflict no poſitive torment upon ſinners; yet their own minds would deal moſt ſeverely with them upon this account, and nothing will gall their conſciences more than to remember againſt what light they did offend. For herein lies the very nature and ſting of all guilt to be conſcious to our ſelves, " that we knew what we ought to have " done, and did it not." The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before, will be pardonable, in compariſon of ours. " The times of that " ignorance GOD winked at: but now he com- " mands all men every where to repent," Mankind had ſome excuſe for their errors before, and

SERM. CXIV.

God was pleased in a great measure to overlook them: but "if we continue still in our sins, we have no "cloke for them." All the degrees of light which we enjoy, are so many talents committed to us by our Lord, for the improving whereof he will call us to a strict account; "for unto whomsoever much "is given, of him much shall be required; and to "whom he hath committed much, of him he will "ask the more." And nothing is more reasonable, than that men should account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of God; and that as their knowledge was increased, so their sorrow and punishment should proportionably rise, if they sin against it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deservedly pitied and lamented by us, but the condemnation of none is so bad, as of those who having the knowledge of God's will, neglected to do it; "how much better had it "been for them not to have known the way of "righteousness, than after they have known it, to "turn from the holy commandment delivered un-"to them!" If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, "we "had had no sin;" in comparison of what now we have: "but now that we see, our sin remains." This will aggravate our condemnation beyond measure, that we had the knowledge of salvation so clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us, we know what we ought to do, and "what man-"ner of persons we ought to be, in all holy con-"versation and godliness." We believe the coming of our Lord to judgment, and we know not how soon he may be "revealed from heaven with "his mighty angels," not only "to take vengeance

"on

" on them that know not GOD," but on them that have known him, and yet " obey not the gospel " of his SON." And if all this will not move us to prepare our selves to do our LORD's will, we deserve to have our stripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for those who offend against the clear knowledge of GOD's will, and their duty. SERM. CXIV.

Let us then be perſuaded to ſet upon the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our underſtandings, deſcend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known ſin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty, and " if " our hearts condemn us not," neither for the neglect of the means of knowledge, nor for rebelling againſt the light of GOD's truth ſhining in our minds, and glaring upon our conſciences, " then " have we confidence towards GOD: but if our hearts " condemn us, GOD is greater than our hearts, and " knows all things."

SERMON

SERMON CXV.

The sins of men not chargeable upon God; but upon themselves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; *for* God *cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

SERM. CXV. The first sermon on this text.

NEXT to the belief a God, and his providence, there is nothing more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of these two principles, "that "God is not the author of sin," and "that every "man's sin lies at his own door, and he hath rea- "son to blame himself for all the evil that he "does."

First, "that God is not the author of sin," that he is no way accessary to our faults, either by tempting or forcing us to the commission of them. For if he were, they would neither properly be sins, nor could they be justly punished. They would not properly be sins, for sin is a contradiction to the will of God; but supposing men to be either tempted or necessitated thereto, that which we call sin, would either be a meer passive obedience to the will of God, or an active compliance with it, but neither way a contradiction to it. Nor could these actions be justly punished;

punished; for all punishment supposeth a fault, and a fault supposeth liberty, and freedom from force and necessity; so that no man can be justly punished for that which he cannot help, and no man can help that which he is necessitated and compell'd to. And tho' there were no force in the case, but only temptation, yet it would be unreasonable for the same person to tempt and punish. For as nothing is more contrary to the holiness of GOD than to tempt men to sin; so nothing can be more against justice and goodness, than first to draw men into a fault, and then to chastise them for it. So that this is a principle which lies at the bottom of all religion, "that GOD is not "the author of the sins of men." And then,

Secondly, "that every man's fault lies at his own "door, and he has reason enough to blame him-"self for all the evil that he does." And this is that which makes men properly guilty, that when they have done amiss, they are conscious to themselves it was their own act, and they might have done otherwise; and guilt is that which makes men liable to punishment; and fear of pumishment is the great restraint from sin, and one of the principal arguments for virtue and obedience.

And both these principles our apostle St. James does here fully assert in the words which I have read unto you. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, "I am tempted of GOD; for GOD cannot be temp-"ted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of "his own lust, and enticed."

In which words, these two things are plainly contained.

First,

SERM. CXV.

First, that GOD doth not tempt any man to sin. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD; for GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

Secondly, that every man's fault lies at his own door, and he is his own greatest tempter. "But every man is tempted, when his is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

I. That GOD doth not tempt any man to sin. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD; for GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." In which words, there are three things to be considered.

First, the proposition which the apostle here rejects, and that is, "that GOD tempts men." "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD."

Secondly, the manner in which he rejects it. "Let no man say so." By which manner of speaking, the apostle insinuates these two things. 1. That men are apt to lay their faults upon GOD: for when he says, "let no man say so," he intimates, that men are apt to say so, and it is very probable that some did say so; and, 2dly, that it is not only a fault, but an impious assertion to say that GOD tempts men. He speaks of it as a thing to be rejected with a detestation. "Let no man say;" that is, far be it from us to affirm a thing so impious and dishonourable to GOD.

Thirdly, the reason and argument that he brings against it, "for GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

First,

SERM. CXV.

Firſt, the propoſition which the apoſtle here rejects, and that is, "that GOD tempts men:" "let no man "ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD." Now that we may the more diſtinctly underſtand the meaning of the propoſition, which the apoſtle here rejects, it will be very requiſite to conſider what temptation is, and the ſeveral ſorts and kinds of it. To tempt a man, is, in general, nothing elſe but to make trial of him in any kind what he will do. In ſcripture, temptation is commonly confin'd to the trial of a man's good or bad, of his virtuous or vicious inclinations. But then it is ſuch a trial as endangers a man's virtue, and if he be not well reſolved, is likely to overcome it, and to make him fall into ſin. So that temptation does always imply ſomething of danger the worſt way. And men are thus tempted, either from themſelves, or by others; by others chiefly theſe two ways.

Firſt, by direct and downright perſuaſions to ſin.

Secondly, by being brought into ſuch circumſtances as will greatly endanger their falling into it, tho' none ſolicit and perſuade them to it.

Firſt, by direct and downright perſuaſions to ſin. Thus the devil tempted our firſt parents, by repreſenting things ſo to them, as might on the one hand incite them to ſin, and on the other hand weaken and looſen that which was the great curb and reſtraint from it. On the one hand he repreſents to them the advantages they ſhould have by breaking GOD's command. "GOD doth know that in the day ye eat "thereof, then your eyes ſhall be opened, and ye "ſhall be as gods, knowing good and evil." On

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SERM. CXV.

the other hand, he represents the danger of offending not to be so great and certain as they imagined. "The serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not "surely die." And the devil had so good success in this way of tempting the first Adam, as to encourage him to set upon the second, our blessed SAVIOUR, in the same manner; for he would have persuaded him "to fall down and worship him," by offering him "all the kingdoms of the world, "and the glory of them." And thus bad men many times tempt others, and endeavour to draw them into the same wicked courses with themselves. Solomon represents to us the manner and the danger of it, Prov. i, 10, 11, 13, 14. "My SON, if sin-"ners entice thee, consent thou not; if they say, "come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us "lurk privily for the innocent without cause; we "shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our "houses with spoil. Cast in thy lot amongst us, let "us all have one purse." This is the first way of temptation.

And to be sure GOD tempts no man this way. He offers no arguments to man to persuade him to sin; he no where proposeth either reward or impunity to sinners; but on the contrary gives all imaginable encouragement to obedience, and threatens the transgression of his law with most dreadful punishments.

Secondly, men are likewise tempted, by being brought into such circumstances, as will greatly endanger their falling into sin, tho' none persuade them to it; and this happens two ways; when men are remarkably beset with the allurements of the world, or assaulted with the evils and calamities of it; for either of these conditions are great temptations

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to men, and make powerful aſſaults upon them, eſ- SERM.
pecially when they fall upon thoſe who are ill diſ- CXV.
poſed before, or are but of a weak virtue and reſolution.

The allurements of the world are ſtrong temptations; riches, and honours, pleaſures, are the occaſions and incentives to many luſts. Honour and greatneſs, power and authority over others, eſpecially when men are ſuddenly lifted up, and from a low condition, are apt to tranſport men to pride and inſolency towards others. Power is a ſtrong liquor which does eaſily intoxicate weak minds, and make them apt to ſay and do indecent things. "Man that is in honour and underſtands not, is "like the beaſts that periſh;" intimating that men who are exalted to an high condition, are very apt to forget themſelves, and to play the fools and beaſts. It requires great conſideration, and a well poiſed mind, not to be lifted up with one's condition. Weak heads are apt to turn and grow dizzy, when they look down from a great height.

And ſo likewiſe eaſe and proſperity are a very ſlippery condition to moſt men, and without great care do endanger the falling into great ſins. So Solomon obſerves, Prov. i. 32. "For the turning "away of the ſimple ſhall ſlay them, and the pro- "ſperity of fools ſhall deſtroy them." For this reaſon Agur maketh his prayer to GOD, that he would "give him neither poverty nor riches," but keep him in a mean condition, becauſe of the danger of both extremes, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. "Give me not riches, "leſt I be full, and deny thee." Both the eager deſire and the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of riches do frequently prove fatal to men. So our SAVIOUR tells

SERM CX.

us elsewhere very emphatically, Matth. xix. 23, 24. "Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly "enter into the kingdom of heaven: and again I "say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through "the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter "into the kingdom of GOD." St. Paul likewise very fully declares unto us the great danger of this condition, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. "But they that will be rich "fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many "foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in "destruction and perdition; for the love of money "is the root of all evil, which while some coveted "after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced "themselves through with many sorrows."

But the greatest bait of all to flesh and blood, is sensual pleasures; the very presence and opportunity of these, are apt to kindle the desires, and to inflame the lusts of men, especially where these temptations meet with suitable tempers, where every spark that falls catcheth.

And on the other hand, the evils and calamities of this world, especially if they threaten or fall upon men in any degree of extremity, are strong temptations to humane nature. Poverty and want, pain and suffering, and the fear of any great evil, especially of death, these are great straits to humane nature, and apt to tempt men to great sins, to impatience and discontent, to unjust and dishonest shifts, to the forsaking of GOD, and apostasy from his truth and religion. Agur was sensible of the dangerous temptation of poverty, and therefore he prays against that, as well as against riches; "give me not po-"verty, lest being poor I steal, and take the name "of the LORD my GOD in vain;" that is, lest I be

be tempted to theft, and perjury. The devil, whoſe trade is to tempt men to ſin, knew very well the force of theſe ſorts of temptations, when he deſires GOD firſt to touch Job in his eſtate, and to ſee what effect that would have, Job i. 11. "But put forth "thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and "he will curſe thee to thy face." And when he found himſelf deceived in this, ſurely he thought, that were he but afflicted with great bodily pains, that would put him out of all patience, and fleſh and blood would not be able to withſtand this temptation, chap. ii. 5. "But put forth thine "hand now, and touch his bone and his fleſh, and "he will curſe thee to thy face." And this was the great temptation that the primitive chriſtians were aſſaulted withal; they were tempted to forſake CHRIST and his religion, by a moſt violent perſecution, by the ſpoiling of their goods, by impriſonment, and torture, and death. And this is that kind of temptation which the apoſtle particularly ſpeaks of before the text, "bleſſed is the man that "endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he "ſhall receive the crown of life, which the LORD "hath promiſed to them that love him;" and then it follows, "let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am "tempted of GOD." And thus I have given an account of the ſeveral ſorts of temptations comprehended under this ſecond head, namely, when men are tempted by being brought into ſuch circumſtances as do greatly endanger their falling into ſin, by the allurements of this world, and by the evils and calamities of it.

And the queſtion is, how far GOD hath an hand in theſe kind of temptations, that ſo we may know how to limit this propoſition, which the apoſtle here rejects,

SERM. CXV.

rejects, "that men are tempted of GOD." "Let "no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted "of GOD."

That the providence of GOD does order, or at least permit men to be brought into these circumstances I have spoken of, which are such dangerous temptations to sin, no man can doubt, that believes his providence to be concern'd in the affairs of the world. All the difficulty is, how far the apostle does here intend to exempt GOD from an hand in these temptations. Now for the clearer understanding of this, it will be requisite to consider the several ends and reasons, which those who tempt others may have in tempting them; and all temptation is for one of these three ends or reasons; either for the trial and improvement of mens virtues; or by way of judgment and punishment for some former great sins and provocations; or with a direct purpose and design to seduce men to sin; these I think are the chief ends and reasons that can be imagined, of exercising men with dangerous temptations.

First, for the exercise and improvement of mens graces and virtues. And this is the end which GOD always aims at, in bringing good men, or permitting them to be brought into dangerous temptations. And therefore St. James speaks of it as a matter of joy, when good men are exercised with afflictions; not because afflictions are desirable for themselves, but because of the happy consequences of them, ver. 2, 3. of this chapter, "My brethren, count it all "joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; know- "ing this, that the trying of your faith worketh "patience." And to the same purpose St. Paul, Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. "We glory in tribulation, know- "ing

" ing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience " experience ;" δοκιμὴν· patience trieth a man, " and this trial worketh hope, and hope maketh not " aſhamed." Theſe are happy effects and conſequences of affliction and ſuffering, when they improve the virtues of men and increaſe their graces, and thereby make way for the increaſe of their glory. Upon this account St. James pronounceth thoſe bleſſed, who are thus tempted. " Bleſſed is the man " that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he " ſhall receive the crown of life, which the LORD " hath promiſed to them that love him."

And this certainly is no diſparagement to the providence of GOD, to permit men to be thus tempted, when he permits it for no other end, but to make them better men, and thereby to prepare them for a greater reward: and ſo the apoſtle aſſures us, Rom. viii. 17, 18. " If ſo be we ſuffer with him, we ſhall " alſo be glorified with him ; for I reckon that the " ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be " compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us." And ver. 28. " For we know that all things ſhall " work together for good to them that love GOD." And this happy end and iſſue of temptations to good men the providence of GOD ſecures to them (if they be not wanting to themſelves) one of theſe two ways, either by proportioning the temptation to their ſtrength ; or if it exceed that, by miniſtring new ſtrength and ſupport to them, by the ſecret and extraordinary aids of his HOLY SPIRIT.

Firſt, by proportioning the temptation to their ſtrength ; ordering things ſo by his ſecret and wiſe providence, that they ſhall not be aſſaulted by any temptation, which is beyond their ſtrength to reſiſt

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SERM CXV.

and overcome. And herein the ſecurity of good men doth ordinarily conſiſt; and the very beſt of us, thoſe who have the firmeſt and moſt reſolute virtue were in infinite danger, if the providence of GOD did not take this care of us. For a temptation may ſet upon the beſt men with ſo much violence, or ſurprize them at ſuch an advantage, as no ordinary degree of grace and virtue is able to withſtand: but where men are ſincerely good, and honeſtly reſolved, the providence of GOD doth ward off theſe fierce blows, and put by theſe violent thruſts, and by a ſecret diſpoſal of things keep them from being aſſaulted by theſe irreſiſtible kinds of temptations.

The conſideration whereof, as it is a great encouragement to men to be ſincerely good, ſo likewiſe a great argument for a continual dependence upon the providence of GOD, and to take us off from confidence in our ſelves, and our own ſtrength. And this uſe the apoſtle makes of it, 1 Cor. x. 12. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he ſtandeth," (that is confident that nothing ſhall be able to ſhake him, or throw him down) "take heed leſt he fall; "there hath no temptation taken you, but ſuch as "is common to men; εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος, but what is "humane;" nothing but what an humane ſtrength, aſſiſted by an ordinary grace of GOD, may be able to reſiſt and conquer. But there are greater and more violent temptations than theſe, which you have not yet been tried with; and when thoſe happen, we muſt have recourſe to GOD for an extraordinary aſſiſtance. And this is the

Second way I mention'd, whereby the providence of GOD does ſecure good men in caſe of extraordinary temptations, which no humane ſtrength can probably

probably reſiſt. And this the ſame apoſtle aſſures us of in the very next words, "God is faithful, who "will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what you "are able, but will with the temptation alſo make "a way to eſcape, that you may be able to bear "it." That is, in caſe of great and violent temptations (ſuch as the chriſtians in the height of their perſecutions were expoſed to) GOD will ſecretly miniſter ſtrength and ſupport equal to the force and power of the temptation. And this GOD did in an extraordinary manner to the chriſtian martyrs, and that to ſuch a degree, as made them joyfully to embrace their ſufferings, and with the greateſt chearfulneſs in the world to endure thoſe torments, which no humane patience was able to bear. And where GOD doth thus ſecure men againſt temptations, or ſupport them under them, it is no reflexion at all upon the goodneſs or juſtice of his providence, to permit them to be thus tempted. SERM. CXV.

Secondly, GOD permits others to be thus tempted, by way of judgment and puniſhment for ſome former great ſins and provocations which they have been guilty of. And thus many times GOD puniſheth great and notorious offenders, by permitting them to fall into great temptations, which meeting with a vicious diſpoſition, are likely to be too hard for them, eſpecially conſidering how by a long habit of wickedneſs, and wilful commiſſion of great and notorious ſins, they have made themſelves an eaſy prey to every temptation, and have driven the SPIRIT of GOD from them, and deprived themſelves of thoſe aids and reſtraints of his grace, which he ordinarily affords, not only to good men, but likewiſe to

SERM. CXV.

thoſe who are not very bad. And thus GOD is ſaid to have "harden'd Pharaoh" by thoſe plagues and judgments which he ſent upon him and his kingdom. But if we carefully read the ſtory, it is ſaid that "he firſt harden'd himſelf" and then that "GOD harden'd him;" that is, he being harden'd under the firſt judgments of GOD, GOD ſent more, which meeting with his obſtinacy, had this natural effect upon him, to harden him yet more; not that GOD did infuſe any wickedneſs or obſtinacy into him, but by his juſt judgments ſent more plagues upon him, which hardened him yet more, and which were likely to have that effect upon him, conſidering the ill temper of the man. And it was juſt by way of puniſhment that they ſhould. And ſo likewiſe, Joſhua xi. 19, 20. it is ſaid that the cities of the Canaanites did not make peace with Joſhua, becauſe "it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, "that they ſhould come againſt Iſrael in battle, that "he might deſtroy them utterly;" that is, for their former iniquities, the meaſure whereof was now full, the providence of GOD did juſtly bring them into, and leave them under thoſe circumſtances, which made them obſtinate againſt all terms of peace, and this proved fatal to them.

And in the like ſenſe we are to underſtand ſeveral other expreſſions in ſcripture, which likewiſe might ſeem very harſh. As Iſaiah vi. 10. "Make the "heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, "and ſhut their eyes, leſt they ſee with their eyes, "and hear with their ears, and underſtand with "their hearts, and convert and be healed;" all which expreſſions ſignify no more, but that GOD, for the former provocations and impenitency of that people,

people, did leave them to their own hardneſs and blindneſs, ſo that they did not deſire to underſtand and make uſe of the means of their recovery. So likewiſe, Rom. i. 24. GOD is ſaid to have given up the idolatrous heathen "to uncleanneſs, to vile and "unnatural luſts;" and ver. 28. "to a reprobate "and injudicious mind;" that is, as a puniſhment of their idolatry, he left them to the power of thoſe temptations, which betrayed them to the vileſt luſts. And to mention but one text more, 2 Theſſ. ii. 11. the apoſtle threatens thoſe that rejected the truth, that "for this cauſe GOD would ſend them ſtrong "deluſions (the efficacy of error) that they ſhould be-"lieve a lye, and that they all might be damned, who "believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighte-"ouſneſs;" that is, as a juſt puniſhment for their renouncing the truth, GOD gave them over to the power of deluſion; their error had its full ſcope at them, to tempt them with all its colours and pretences. SERM. CXV.

But it is obſervable, that, in all theſe places which I have mention'd, GOD is ſaid to give men up to the power of temptation, as a puniſhment of ſome former great crimes and provocations. And it is not unjuſt with GOD thus to deal with men, to leave them to the power of temptation, when they had firſt wilfully forſaken him; and in this caſe GOD doth not tempt men to ſin, but leaves them to themſelves, to be tempted by their own hearts luſts; and if they yield and are conquered, it is their own fault, becauſe they have neglected GOD's grace, whereby they might have been able to have reſiſted thoſe temptations; and have forced his HOLY SPIRIT to withdraw himſelf from them, and to leave

SERM. CXV.

them open and naked to those assaults of temptation, against which they might otherwise have been sufficiently armed.

Thirdly, the last end of temptation which I mentioned, is to try men, with a direct purpose and intention to seduce men to sin. Thus wicked men tempt others, and thus the devil tempts men. Thus he tempted our first parents, and seduced them from their obedience and allegiance to GOD. Thus he tempted Job, by bringing him into those circumstances, which were very likely to have forc'd him into impatience and discontent. And thus he tempted our blessed SAVIOUR; but found nothing in him to work upon, or to give him any advantage over him. And thus he daily tempts men, by laying all sorts of baits and snares before them, "going about "continually, seeking whom he may seduce and "destroy;" and as far as GOD permits him, and his power reacheth, he suits his temptations as near as he can to the humours and appetites and inclinations of men, contriving them into such circumstances, as that he may ply his temptations upon them to the greatest advantage; propounding such objects to them, as may most probably draw forth the corruptions of men, and kindle their irregular desires, and inflame their lusts, and tempt their evil inclinations that way, which they are most strongly bent. He tempts the covetous man with gain, the ambitious man with preferment, the voluptuous man with carnal and sensual pleasures; and where none of these baits will take, he stirs up his instruments to persecute those, who are stedfast and confirmed in resolutions of piety and virtue, to try if he can work upon their fear, and shake their constancy and fidelity

fidelity to GOD and goodneſs that way; and all that he doth with a direct deſign and earneſt deſire to ſeduce men from their duty, and to betray them to ſin.

But thus "GOD tempts no man," and in this ſenſe it is that the apoſtle means, that "no man "when he is tempted, is tempted of GOD." GOD hath no deſign to ſeduce any man to ſin. He often proves the obedience of men, and ſuffers them to "fall into divers temptations, for the trial of "their faith," and exerciſe of their obedience and other virtues, and he permits bad men to be aſſaulted with great temptations, and as a puniſhment of their former obſtinacy and impiety, withdraws the aids and aſſiſtances of his grace from them, and leaves them to their own weakneſs and folly; but not ſo as to take away all reſtraint of his grace even from bad men, unleſs it be upon very high provocation, and a long and obſtinate continuance in ſin: but GOD never tempts any man, with any intention to ſeduce him to ſin, and with a deſire he ſhould do wickedly. This is the proper work of the devil and his inſtruments; in this ſenſe it is far from "GOD "to tempt any man;" and whenever in the ordinary courſe, and by the common permiſſion of his providence, men "fall into temptation," the utmoſt that GOD does, is "to leave them to them-"ſelves;" and he does not do this neither, but to thoſe who have highly provoked him to depart from them, that is, to thoſe who have juſtly deſerved to be ſo dealt withal.

And thus I have conſider'd the propoſition which the apoſtle here rejects, namely, "that God tempts "men," and have ſhewn as clearly as I can, how it

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SERM. CXV.

is to be limited and understood. I now proceed to the second thing which I propounded to consider, viz. the manner in which the apostle rejects this proposition, "let no man say when he is "tempted, I am tempted of GOD." By which manner of speaking, he insinuates two things.

First, that men are apt to lay their faults upon GOD. For when he says, "let no man say so," he intimates that men were apt to say thus; and 'tis probable some did say so, to excuse themselves for their deserting their religion upon the temptation of persecution and suffering. 'Tis not unlikely that men might lay the fault upon GOD's providence, which expose them to these difficult trials, and thereby tempted them to forsake their religion.

But however this be, we find it very natural to men, to transfer their faults upon others. Men are naturally sensible when they offend, and do contrary to their duty; and the guilt of sin is an heavy burden, of which men would be glad to ease themselves as much as they can; and they think it is a mitigation and excuse of their faults if they did not proceed only from themselves, but from the violence and compulsion, the temptation and instigation of others. But especially men are very glad to lay their faults upon GOD, because he is a full and sufficient excuse, nothing being to be blamed that comes from him. Thus Adam did, upon the commission of the very first sin that mankind was guilty of. When GOD charged him for breaking of his law, by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, he endeavours to excuse himself by laying the fault obliquely upon GOD; "the "woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she "gave me of the tree, and I did eat." "The wo-

"man

" man whom thou gaveſt to be with me;" he does what he can to derive the fault upon GOD. And though his be very unreaſonable, yet it ſeems it is very natural. Men would fain have the pleaſure of committing ſin, but then they would be glad to remove as much of the trouble and guilt of it from themſelves as they can. SERM. CXV.

Secondly, this manner of ſpeech, which the apoſtle here uſeth, doth inſinuate farther to us, that it is not only a falſe, but an impious aſſertion to ſay that GOD tempts men to ſin. He ſpeaks of it, not as a thing unfit to be ſaid, but fit to be rejected with the greateſt indignation; " let no man ſay," that is, far be it from us to affirm any thing ſo impious and ſo diſhonourable to GOD. For nothing can be more contrary to the holy and righteous nature of GOD, and to thoſe plain declarations which he hath made of himſelf, than to ſeduce men to wickedneſs; and therefore no man, that hath any regard to the honour of GOD, can entertain the leaſt ſuſpicion of his having any hand in the ſins of men, or give heed to any principles or doctrines, from whence ſo odious and abominable a conſequence may be drawn. I proceed to the

Third thing I propounded to conſider, viz. the reaſon or argument which the apoſtle brings againſt this impious ſuggeſtion; " that GOD cannot be tempted with evil," and therefore no man can imagine that he ſhould tempt any man to it; " let no man " ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD; for " GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth " he any man." And in ſpeaking to this, I ſhall

Firſt, conſider the ſtrength and force of this argument; and

Secondly,

SERM. CXV.

Secondly, the nature and kind of it.

First, the strength and force of this argument, "GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempt-"eth he any man;" ἀπείραστος κακῶν, "he is "untemptible by evil;" he cannot be drawn to any thing that is bad himself, and therefore it cannot be imagined he should have any inclination or design to seduce others. And this will appear to be a strong and forcible argument, if we consider,

First, the proposition upon which it is grounded, "that GOD cannot be tempted by evil."

Secondly, the consequence that clearly follows from it; and that is, that because GOD cannot be tempted by evil, therefore "he cannot tempt any "man to it."

First, we will consider the proposition upon which this argument is built, and that is, "that GOD can-"not be tempted by evil." He is out of the reach of any temptation to evil. Whoever is tempted to any thing, is either tempted by his own inclination, or by the allurement of the object, or by some external motive and consideration: but none of all these can be imagined to have any place in GOD, to tempt him to evil.

For, first, he hath no temptation to it from his own inclination. The holy and pure nature of GOD is at the greatest distance from evil, and at the greatest contrariety to it. He is so far from having any inclination to evil, that it is the only thing in the world to which he hath an irreconcilable antipathy. This the scripture frequently declares to us, and that in a very emphatical manner, Psal. v. 4. "He is not "a GOD that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither "shall evil dwell with him." The words are a

diminution,

diminution, and leſs is ſaid, than is intended by them; the meaning is, that GOD is ſo far from taking pleaſure in ſin, that he hath a perfect hatred and abhorrence of it. Hab. ii. 13. "Thou art of purer "eyes than to behold evil, and canſt not look upon "iniquity." As when men hate a thing to the higheſt degree, they turn away their eyes, and cannot endure to look upon it. Light and darkneſs are not more oppoſite to one another, than the holy nature of GOD is to ſin. "What fellowſhip hath light "with darkneſs, or GOD with Belial?"

Secondly, there is no allurement in the object, to ſtir up any inclination in him towards it. Sin in its very nature is imperfection, and irregularity, crookedneſs, and deformity; ſo that unleſs there be an inclination to it beforehand, there is nothing in it to move any one's liking or deſire towards it; it hath no attractives or enticements in it, but to a corrupt and ill-diſpoſed mind.

Thirdly, neither are there external motives and conſiderations, that can be imagined to tempt GOD to it. All arguments that have any temptation, are either founded in hope or in fear; either in the hope of gaining ſome benefit or advantage, or in the fear of falling into ſome miſchief or inconvenience. Now the divine nature being perfectly happy, and perfectly ſecured in its own happineſs, is out of the reach of any of theſe temptations. Men are many times tempted to evil very ſtrongly by theſe conſiderations; they want many things to make them happy, and they fear many things which may make them miſerable; and the hopes of the one and the fears of the other, are apt to work very

SERM. CXV.

powerfully upon them, to seduce them from their duty, and to draw them to sin: but the divine nature is firm against all these attempts, by its own fulness and security. So that you see now the proposition, upon which the apostle grounds his argument, is evidently true, and beyond all exception, "that GOD cannot be tempted with evil." Let us then in the

Second place, consider the consequence that clearly follows from it, that because GOD cannot be tempted with evil, "therefore he cannot tempt any "man to it." For why should he desire to draw men into that, which he himself abhors, and which is so contrary to his own nature and disposition? when men tempt one another to sin, they do it to make others like themselves; and when the devil tempts men to sin, it is either out of direct malice to GOD, or out of envy to men. But none of these considerations can have any place in GOD, or be any motive to him to tempt men to sin.

Bad men tempt others to sin, to make them like themselves, and that with one of these two designs; either for the comfort or pleasure of company, or for the countenance of it, that there may be some kind of apology and excuse for them.

For the comfort and pleasure of company. Man does not love to be alone; and for this reason bad men endeavour to make others like themselves, that agreeing with them in the same disposition and manners, they may be fit company for them. For no man takes pleasure in the society and conversation of those, who are of contrary tempers and inclinations to them, because they are continually warring and clashing with one another. And for this reason bad

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men hate and perſecute thoſe that are good. "Let SERM. CXV.
"us lie in wait (ſay they) for the righteous, becauſe
"he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our
"doings; he is grievous unto us even to behold;
"for his life is not like other mens, and his ways
"are of another faſhion;" as it is expreſt in the Wiſdom of Solomon. So that wicked men tempt others to ſin, that they may have the pleaſure and contentment of their ſociety. But now for this reaſon GOD cannot be imagined to tempt men to ſin; becauſe that would be the way to make them unlike himſelf, and ſuch as his ſoul could take no pleaſure in.

Another deſign that bad men have in ſeducing others to ſin, is thereby to give countenance to their bad actions, and to be ſome kind of excuſe and apology for them. Among men, the multitude of offenders does ſometimes procure impunity, but it always gives countenance to vice; and men are apt to alledge it in their excuſe, that they are not alone guilty of ſuch a fault, that they did not do it without company and example; which is the reaſon of that law, Exod. xxiii. 2. "Thou ſhalt not follow a mul-
"titude to do evil;" implying, that men are very apt to take encouragement to any thing that is bad, from company and example. But neither hath this reaſon any place in GOD, who being far from doing evil himſelf, can have no reaſon to tempt others to do ſo, by way of excuſe, and vindication of himſelf.

And when the devil tempts men to ſin, it is either out of direct malice to GOD, or out of envy to men. Out of malice to God, to ſpoil his workmanſhip, and to pervert that which came innocent and upright

SERM. CXV.

out of his hands; to rob GOD of his ſubjects, and to debauch them from their duty and allegiance to him; to ſtrengthen the rebellion which he has raiſed againſt God, and to make him as many enemies as he can. But for this end GOD cannot tempt any man; for this would be to procure diſhonour to himſelf, and to deface the work of his own hands.

Another reaſon why the devil tempts men, is envy. When he was fallen from GOD, and happineſs, and by his own rebellion had made himſelf miſerable, he was diſcontented to ſee the happy condition of man, and it grieved him at his very heart; and this moved him to tempt man to ſin, that he might involve him in the ſame miſery into which he had plunged himſelf. It is a pleaſure to envy to overturn the happineſs of others, and to lay them level with themſelves. But the divine nature is full of goodneſs, and delights in the happineſs of all his creatures. His own incomparable felicity has placed him as much above any temptation to envying others, as above any occaſion of being contemned by them. He grudges no man's happineſs, and therefore cannot tempt men to ſin, out of a deſire to ſee them miſerable. So that none of thoſe conſiderations which move the devil to tempt men to ſin, and evil men to tempt one another to do wickedly, can be imagined to have any place in GOD.

And thus you ſee the force of the apoſtle's argument, that becauſe "GOD cannot be tempted to "evil," therefore "he can tempt no man." None tempt others to be bad, but thoſe who are firſt ſo themſelves. I ſhall now in the

Second place, conſider the nature and kind of the argument, which the apoſtle here uſeth, "let no man

"ſay

" ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD; SERM. CXV.
" for GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither " tempteth he any man." It does not reject this impious propoſition barely upon his own authority; but he argues againſt it from the nature and perfection of GOD; and therein appeals to the common notion of mankind concerning GOD. We might very well have reſted in his authority, being an apoſtle commiſſioned by our SAVIOUR, and extraordinarily aſſiſted and witneſſed to, by the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, wherewith he was endowed. But he condeſcends to give a reaſon of what he ſays, and appeals to the common principles of mankind. For all men will readily agree to this, " that GOD hath all imaginable perfection:" but it is a plain imperfection to be liable to be tempted to evil, and therefore " GOD cannot be tempted " to evil." And if ſo, it is as impoſſible " that he " ſhould tempt others to it;" for none can have either an inclination or intereſt to ſeduce others to evil, but thoſe who have been firſt ſeduced to it themſelves.

Now in this method of arguing, the apoſtle teacheth us one of the ſureſt ways of reaſoning in religion; namely, from the natural notions which men have of GOD. So that all doctrines plainly contrary to thoſe natural notions which men have of GOD, are to be rejected, what authority ſoever they pretend to; whatever plainly derogates from the goodneſs or juſtice of GOD, or any other of his perfections, is certainly falſe, what authority ſoever it may claim from the judgment of learned and pious men; yea tho' it pretend to be countenanc'd from the texts and expreſſions of holy ſcripture. Be-

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SERM. CXV.

cause nothing can be entertain'd as a divine revelation, which plainly contradicts the common natural notions which mankind have of GOD. For all reasoning about divine revelation, and whether that which pretends to be so, be really so or not, is to be govern'd by those natural notions. And if any thing that pretends to be a revelation from GOD, should teach men that there is no GOD, or that he is not wise, and good, and just, and powerful; this is reason enough to reject it, how confident soever the pretence be, that it is a divine revelation.

And if any thing be, upon good grounds in reason, received for a divine revelation, (as the holy scriptures are amongst christians) no man ought to be regarded, who from thence pretends to maintain any doctrine contrary to the natural notions, which men have of GOD; such as clearly contradict his holiness, or goodness, or justice, or do by plain and undeniable consequence make GOD the author of sin, or the like; because the very attempt to prove any such thing out of the scripture, does strike at the divine authority of those books. For if they be from GOD it is certain they can contain no such thing. So that no man ought to suffer himself to be seduced into any such opinions, upon pretence that there are expressions in scripture, which seem to countenance them. For if they really did so, the consequence would not be the confirming of such opinions; but the weakning of the authority of the scripture it self. For just so many arguments as any man can draw from scripture for any such opinion, so many weapons he puts into the hands of atheists against the scripture it self.

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SERM. CXV.

I do not ſpeak this, as if I thought there were any ground from ſcripture for any ſuch doctrine, I am very certain there is not. And if there be any particular expreſſions, which to prejudic'd men may ſeem to import any ſuch thing, every man ought to govern himſelf in the interpretation of ſuch paſſages, by what is clear and plain, and agreeable to the main ſcope and tenor of the bible, and to thoſe natural notions which men have of GOD, and of his perfections. For when all is done, this one of the ſureſt ways of reaſoning in religion; and whoever guides himſelf, and ſteers by this compaſs, can never err much: but whoever ſuffers himſelf to be led away by the appearance of ſome more obſcure phraſes in the expreſſions of ſcripture, and the gloſſes of men upon them, without regard to this rule, may run into the greateſt deluſions, may wander eternally, and loſe himſelf in one miſtake after another, and ſhall never find his way out of this endleſs labyrinth, but by this clue.

If St. James had not been an apoſtle, the argument which he uſed would have convinced any reaſonable man, "that GOD tempts no man to ſin, becauſe "he cannot be tempted with evil himſelf," and therefore it is unreaſonable to imagine "he ſhould "tempt any man." For he argues from ſuch a principle, as all mankind will, at firſt hearing, aſſent to.

And thus I have done with the firſt thing aſſerted by the apoſtle here in the text; "that GOD tempts "no man to ſin." "Let no man ſay, when he is "tempted, I am tempted of GOD; for GOD can-"not be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any "man." Before I proceed to the ſecond aſſertion,

"that

" that every man is his own greatest tempter," I should draw some useful inferences from what hath been already delivered: but I reserve both the one and the other to the next opportunity.

SERMON CXVI.

The sins of men not chargeable upon GOD; but upon themselves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted o GOD; *for* GOD *cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

SERM. CXVI.

The second sermon on this text.

WHEN I made entrance upon these words, I told you, that next to the belief of a GOD and a providence, nothing is more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of these two principles; " that " GOD is not the author of the sins of men;" and " that every man's fault lies at his own door." And both these principles St. James does clearly and fully assert in these words.

First, " GOD tempts no man to sin."

Secondly, " every man is his own greatest " tempter."

The first of these I have largely spoken to in my former discourse; and from what I then said, I shall only

only draw a few uſeful inferences, before I proceed to the ſecond, viz. theſe which follow. SERM. CXVI.

Firſt, let us beware of all ſuch doctrines, as do any ways tend to make GOD the author of ſin; either by laying a neceſſity upon men of ſinning, or by laying ſecret deſigns to tempt and ſeduce men to ſin. Nothing can be farther from the nature of GOD, than to do any ſuch thing, and nothing can be more diſhonourable to him, than to imagine any ſuch thing of him; "he is of purer eyes than to "behold evil;" and can we think, that he who cannot endure to ſee it, ſhould have any hand in it? we find that the holy men in ſcripture are very careful to remove all thoughts and ſuſpicion of this from GOD. Elihu, Job xxxvi. 3. before he would argue about GOD's providence with Job, he reſolves in the firſt place, to attribute nothing to GOD, that is unworthy of him. "I will (ſays he) aſcribe "righteouſneſs to my maker." So likewiſe St. Paul, Rom. vii. 7. "What ſhall we ſay then? is the law "ſin? GOD forbid." "Is the law ſin?" that is, hath GOD given men a law to this end, that he might draw them into ſin? far be it from him. Gal. ii. 17. "Is CHRIST the miniſter of ſin? GOD for-"bid."

You ſee then how tender good men have always been of aſcribing any thing to GOD, that might ſeem to render him the author of ſin. So that we have reaſon to take heed of all doctrines that are of this tendency; ſuch as are the doctrine of an abſolute and irreſpective decree to damn the greateſt part of mankind; and in order to that, and as a means to it, efficaciouſly to permit them to ſin.

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SERM. CXVI.

For if these things be true, that GOD hath absolutely decreed to damn the greatest part of men, and to make good this decree he permits them to sin, not by a bare permission of leaving them to themselves, but by such a permission as shall be efficacious; that is, he will so permit them to sin, as they cannot avoid it; then those who are under this decree of GOD, are under a necessity of sinning; which necessity, since it does not proceed from themselves, but from the decree of GOD, does by consequence make GOD the author of sin. And then that the other doctrine, which is subservient to this, that GOD does by a physical and natural influence upon the minds and wills of men, determine them to every action that they do, to bad actions as well as good. I know they who say so, tell us that GOD only determines men to the action, but not to the evil of it. For instance, when Cain killed his brother, GOD determin'd him (they say) to the natural action of taking away a man's life, which in many cases may be done without sin. Very true: but if in these circumstances the natural action could not be done without committing the sin, he that determined him to the natural action, determin'd him likewise to the sin.

I am far from any thought that those that maintain these doctrines, had any intention to make GOD the author of sin: but if this be the true necessary consequence of these doctrines, there is reason enough to reject them, how innocent soever the intention be of those who maintain them.

Secondly, let not us tempt any man to sin. All piety pretends to be an imitation of GOD, therefore let us endeavour to be like him in this. 'Tis true indeed,

indeed, we may be tempted with evil, and therefore we are likely enough to tempt others: but we ought not to do ſo. It is contrary to holineſs and goodneſs, to the temper and diſpoſition of the moſt perfect being in the world. God tempts no man; nay, it is the proper work and employment of the devil, 'tis his very trade and profeſſion; he goes about ſeeking whom he may betray into ſin and deſtruction. To this end he walks up and down the earth, waiting all opportunities and advantages upon men to draw them into ſin; ſo that we are his factors and inſtruments, whenever we tempt men to ſin. SERM. CXVI.

Let thoſe conſider this, who are ſo active and buſy to ſeduce men into any kind of wickedneſs, and to inſtruct them in the arts of iniquity, who tempt men into bad company and courſes, and take pleaſure in debauching a virtuous perſon, and make it matter of great triumph to make a ſober man drunk, as if it were ſo glorious an action to ruin a ſoul, and deſtroy that, which is more worth than the whole world. Whenever you go about this work, remember whoſe inſtruments you are, and whoſe work you do, and what kind of work it is. Tempting others to ſin is in ſcripture called murder, for which reaſon, the devil is ſaid to be "a murderer from the be-"ginning," becauſe he was a tempter. "Who-"ſoever committeth ſin is of the devil:" but whoſoever tempts others to ſin, is a ſort of devil himſelf.

Thirdly, ſince God tempts no man, let us not tempt him. There is frequent mention in ſcripture of mens tempting God, i. e. trying him as it were whether he will do any thing for their ſakes, that is miſ-becoming his goodneſs, and wiſdom, and

SERM. CXVI.

faithfulness, or any other of his perfections. Thus the Israelites are said to have "tempted GOD in "the wilderness forty years together," and in that space, more remarkably ten times. The meaning of which expressions is, that when GOD had promised Abraham to bring his seed into the land of Canaan, that people, by their great and repeated provocations of GOD, did often provoke him to have destroyed them, and consequently to have fail'd of the promise which he made to the fathers. The devil likewise tempted our SAVIOUR to tempt GOD, by casting himself down from the pinacle of the temple, in confidence that the angels would take care of him: but our SAVIOUR answers him, "it "is written, thou shalt not tempt the LORD "thy GOD." From which instance it appears, that men are said to tempt GOD, whenever they expect the protection of his providence in an unwarrantable way. GOD hath promised to take care of good men: but if they neglect themselves, or willingly cast themselves into danger, and expect his providence and protection, they do not trust GOD, but tempt him; they try whether GOD's providence will countenance their rashness, and provide for them, when they neglect themselves; and protect them from those dangers to which they wilfully expose themselves.

So likewise if we be negligent in our callings, whereby we should provide for our families, if we lavish away that which we should lay up for them, and then depend upon the providence of GOD to supply them, and take care of them, we tempt GOD to that which is unworthy of him; which is to give approbation to our folly, and to countenance

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our ſloth and careleſneſs. We cannot ſeduce GOD, and draw him to do any thing that miſ-becomes him, but we tempt him, in expecting the care and protection of his providence, when we wilfully run our ſelves into danger, and neglect the means of providing for our own ſafety. And thus I have done with the firſt great principle contain'd in the text; viz, "That GOD is not the author of the ſins "of men." I proceed now to the

Second, "that every man is his own greateſt "tempter." "But every man is tempted, when "he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed." GOD does not tempt any man to ſin: but every man is then tempted, when by his own luſt, his irregular inclination and deſire, he is ſeduced to evil, and enticed; ἀ δελεαζόμενοι, is caught as it were with a bait, for ſo the greek word ſignifies.

In which words the apoſtle gives us a true account of the prevalency and efficacy of temptation upon men. It is not becauſe GOD has any deſign to enſnare men in ſin; but their own corruption and vicious inclinations ſeduce them to that which is evil. To inſtance in the particular temptations the apoſtle was ſpeaking of, perſecution and ſuffering for the cauſe of religion, to avoid which, many did then forſake the truth, and apoſtatiz'd from their chriſtian profeſſion. The true cauſe of which, was not the providence of GOD, which permitted them to be expos'd to thoſe ſufferings; but their inordinate love of the good things of this life, and their unreaſonable fears of the evils and ſufferings of it; they valued the enjoyments of this preſent life, more than the favour of GOD, and that eternal happineſs

SERM. CXVI.

ness which he had promis'd to them in another life; and they feared the persecutions of men, more than the threatnings of GOD, and the dreadful punishments of another world. They had an inordinate affection for the ease and pleasure of this life, and their unwillingness to part with ease, was a great temptation to them to quit their religion; by this bait they were caught, when it came to the trial.

And thus it is proportionably in all other sorts of temptations. Men are betrayed by themselves, and the temptation without hath a party within them, with which it holds a secret correspondence, and which is ready to yield and give consent to it; so that it is our own consent, and treachery to our selves, that makes any temptation master of us, and without that we are not to be overcome; "every "man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of "his own lust, and enticed." It is the lust of men complying with the temptations which are offer'd to us, which renders them effectual, and gives them the victory over us.

In the handling of this argument. I shall from these words of the apostle observe to you these two things.

First, that as the apostle doth here acquit GOD from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency of temptation to the devil.

Secondly, that he ascribes the prevalency of temptation to the lust and vicious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a compliance with the temptations that are presented to them; "every "man

" man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his " own luſt, and enticed." Theſe two obſervations ſhall be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe. SERM. CXVI.

Firſt, that as the apoſtle doth here acquit GOD from any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo he does not aſcribe the prevalency and efficacy of temptation to the devil. That he acquits GOD, I have ſhewn at large in my former diſcourſe. It is evident likewiſe, that he does not aſcribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the devil; for the apoſtle in this diſcourſe of his concerning temptations, makes no expreſs mention of the devil; he ſuppoſeth indeed, that baits are laid for men, " every man is " tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, " and enticed;" i. e. when he plays with the baits that are laid for him, and ſwallows them. And the ſcripture elſewhere frequently tells us, that the devil is very active and buſy to tempt men, and is continually laying baits before them; but their own luſts are the cauſe why they are caught by them.

And I do the rather inſiſt upon this, becauſe men are apt to lay great load upon the devil, in the buſineſs of temptation, hoping thereby either wholly, or at laaſt in a great meaſure to excuſe themſelves; and therefore I ſhall here conſider, how far the devil by his temptations is the cauſe of the ſins which men by compliance with thoſe temptations are drawn into.

Firſt, it is certain that the devil is very active and buſy to miniſter to them the occaſions of ſin, and temptations to it. For ever ſince he fell from GOD, partly out of enmity to him, and partly out of envy and malice to mankind, he hath made it his great buſineſs and employment to ſeduce men to

SERM. CXVI.

to sin; and to this end he walks up and down the earth, and watcheth all occasions and opportunities to tempt men to sin: and so far as his power reacheth, and GOD permits him, he lays baits and temptations before them in all their ways, presenting them with the occasions and opportunities to sin, and with such baits and allurements as are most suitable to their tempers, and most likely to prevail with their particular inclinations, and as often as he can, surprizing men with these at the easiest time of access, and with such circumstances, as may give his temptations the greatest force and advantage. Of this the scripture assures us in general, when it tells us of these wiles and devices of Satan, and of the methods of his temptations; so that tho' we do not particularly discern how and when he doth this, yet we have no reason to doubt of the thing, if we believe that there is such a spirit in the world, as the scripture particularly tells us there is, that works in the children of disobedience, and that GOD, from whom nothing is hid, and who sees all the secret engines which are at work in the world, to do us good or harm, hath in mercy to mankind given us particular warning of it, and that we may not be wholly ignorant of our enemies, and their malicious designs upon us, that we may be continually upon our guard, aware of our danger, and armed against it.

Secondly, the devil does not only present to men the temptations and occasions of sin; but when he is permitted to make nearer approaches to them, does excite and stir them up to comply with these temptations, and to yield to them. And this he does, not only by employing his instruments to solicit

licit for him, and to draw men to ſin by bad coun- SERM. CXVI.
ſel and example, which we ſee frequently done, and probably very often by the devil's inſtigation; (thoſe who are very wicked themſelves, and conſequently more enſlav'd to the devil, and under his power, being as it were factors for him to ſeduce others;) beſides this, 'tis not improbable but the devil himſelf does many times immediately excite men to ſin, by working upon the humours of their bodies, or upon their imaginations; and by that means infuſing and ſuggeſting evil motions into them; or by diverting them from thoſe thoughts and conſiderations, which might check and reſtrain them from that wickedneſs to which he is tempting them; or by ſome other ways and means more ſecret and unknown to us. For the power of the ſpirits, whether good or bad, and the manner of their operations upon our minds, are things very ſecret, and of which we can give little or no account, but yet for all that, we have many times reaſon ſufficient to believe a thing to be ſo, when we are wholly ignorant of the manner of it.

And there is reaſon, for what is ſaid in ſcripture, to believe that the devil, in ſome caſes, hath a more immediate power and influence upon the minds of men, to excite them to ſin, and, where he diſcovers a very bad inclination or reſolution, to help it forward, and to keep men to it; as when it is ſaid, John xiii. 27. that "the devil enter'd into Judas," to puſh him on in that ill deſign which he had already engaged in, of betraying our SAVIOUR. And Acts v. 3. Satan is ſaid to have "filled the heart of

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SERM. CXVI.

" Ananias, to lye to the HOLY GHOST, and to keep " back part of the price" for which he had sold his estate; which expressions do seem to intimate to us some more immediate power and influence which the devil had upon those persons: but then 'tis very observable, that this power is never ascribed to the devil, but in the case of great and horrid sins, and where men are beforehand notoriously depraved, and either by the actual commission of some former great sin, or by entertaining some very wicked design, have provoked GOD to permit the devil a nearer access to them. For Judas had first taken counsel how to betray CHRIST, before it is said " the devil " entred into him," to push him on to the execution of it. And Ananias his covetousness had first tempted him to keep back part of his estate, before it is said " the devil filled his heart to lye to the " HOLY GHOST;" so that what power the devil hath over men, they first give it him; they consent to his outward temptations, before he can get within them. Hence it is that in scripture great sinners are described, as being more immediately under the government and influence of the devil. Ephes. ii. 1, 2. where the apostle speaking of those, who from heathenism were converted to christianity, " you (says he) hath " he quickned, who were once dead in trespasses and " sins; wherein in times past ye walked, according to " the course of this world, according to the prince of " the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh " in the children of disobedience, or unbelief;" τῷ πνεύματι τῷ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντι, " the spirit that still " acts and inspires the children of unbelief;" that is, those who continue in their infidelity, and would not believe and obey the gospel. When men are notoriously

notoriouſly wicked and diſobedient to the counſels of GOD, the devil is ſaid to act and inſpire them, which certainly ſignifies ſome more immediate power and influence which he hath over ſuch perſons. SERM. CXVI.

For as it is very probable, that the devil is ſometimes permitted to come near good men ſo as to tempt them; ſo by notorious wickedneſs and impiety, men do give admiſſion to him, and he is permitted by the juſt judgment of GOD, to exerciſe greater dominion over them. By reſiſting his temptations, we drive him from us. So St. James tells us, chap. iv. ver. 7. "Reſiſt the devil, and he "will flee from you:" but as we yield to his temptations, he continually makes nearer approaches to us, and gains a greater power over us.

Thirdly, but for all this, the devil can force no man to ſin; his temptations may move and excite men to ſin, but that they are prevalent and effectual, proceeds from our own will and conſent; 'tis our own luſts cloſing with his temptations, that produce ſin, the devil hath more or leſs power over men, according as they give way to him; but never ſo much as to force their wills, and to compel them to conſent to, and comply with his temptations; the grace of GOD doth hardly offer this violence to men for their good, in order to their ſalvation; and therefore much leſs will he permit the devil to have this power over men to their ruin and deſtruction. GOD's commanding us to reſiſt the devil, ſuppoſeth that his temptations are not irreſiſtible.

Fourthly, from what hath been ſaid, it appears, that tho' the devil be frequently acceſſary to the ſins of men, yet we our ſelves are the authors of them; he tempts us many times to ſin, but it is we that

SERM. CXVI.

commit it. His temptations may ſometimes be ſo violent as to extenuate our fault, but never ſo forcible as wholly to excuſe us; for we are ſo far guilty of ſin, as we give our conſent to it; and how powerful ſoever the temptation be to any kind of evil, there is always enough of our own will in it to render us guilty.

I am far from thinking that the devil tempts men to all the evil that they do. I rather think that the greateſt part of the wickedneſs that is committed in the world, ſprings from the evil motions of mens own minds. Mens own luſts are generally to them the worſt devil of the two, and do more ſtrongly incline them to ſin, than any devil without them can tempt them to it. It is not to be doubted, that the devil does all the miſchief he can to the ſouls of men, ſo far as GOD permits him; and tho' the number of evil angels be probably very great, yet it is but finite, and every one of them hath a limited power; and tho' they be very active, yet they can be but one where at once; ſo that his malice at the utmoſt does only all the evil that it can, not all that it would; he plies where he has the beſt cuſtom, where he has the faireſt opportunity, and the greateſt hopes; he leaves men many times for a ſeaſon (as it is ſaid) he did our SAVIOUR, becauſe he deſpairs of ſucceſs at that time; and it may be ſometimes when he is gone, theſe perſons grow ſecure, and through their own ſecurity and folly fall into thoſe ſins, which the devil with all his baits and wiles, whilſt they were upon their guard, could not tempt them to commit.

Others after he has made them ſure, and put them into the way of it, will go on of themſelves, and

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are as mad of ſinning, as forward to deſtroy themſelves, as the devil himſelf could wiſh; ſo that he can hardly tempt men to any wickedneſs, which he does not find them inclined to of themſelves. Theſe he can truſt with themſelves, and leave them to their own inclinations and conduct, finding by experience, that they will do as ill things of their own motion, as if Satan ſtood continually at their right hand to prompt them, and put them on, ſo that he can go into a far country, and employ himſelf elſewhere, and leave them for a long time, being confident that in his abſence they will not bury their talent, and hide it in a napkin, but will improve it to a great advantage. And I wiſh that our own age did not afford us too many inſtances of this kind, of ſuch forward and expert ſinners as need no tempter either to inſtruct or excite them to that which is evil. Now in this caſe the devil betakes himſelf to other perſons, and removes his ſnares and baits where he thinks there is more need and occaſion for them.

So that we may reaſonably conclude, that there is a great deal of wickedneſs committed in the world, which the devil hath no immediate hand in, tho' he always rejoiceth in it when it is done; and that there is a great deal more reaſon to attribute all good to the motions and operations of the SPIRIT of GOD, than to aſcribe all ſin and wickedneſs in the world to the devil; becauſe the SPIRIT of GOD is more powerful, and is always every where, and is more intent upon his deſign, and as forward to promote it, as the devil can be to carry on his work; nay, I doubt not but he is more active to excite men to good, than the devil can be to tempt them to evil. And yet for all this, I think there is no

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SERM. CXVI.

great reaſon to doubt, but that good men do many good actions of their own inclination, without any ſpecial and immediate motion from the SPIRIT of GOD. They are indeed at firſt regenerate, and ſanctified by the HOLY GHOST, and are continually afterwards under the conduct of the ſame SPIRIT: but where there is a new nature, it is of itſelf inclinable to that which is good, and will bring forth fruits, and do actions anſwerable. Much leſs do I think that the devil tempts every man to all the evil that he does, or the greateſt part. When the luſts of men, and the habits of vice are grown ſtrong and confirmed, the devil may ſpare his temptations in a great meaſure; for after wicked men are wound up to ſuch a pitch of impiety, they will go a great while of themſelves.

I have done with the firſt obſervation, that as the apoſtle acquits GOD from having any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo neither does he aſcribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the devil. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, that he aſcribes the efficacy and ſucceſs of temptation to the luſts and vicious inclinations of men, which ſeduce them to a conſent and compliance with the temptations which are afforded to them. "Every man is tempted, when "he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed." We have many powerful enemies; but we are much more in danger of treachery from within, than of aſſaults from without. All the power of our enemies could not deſtroy us, if we were but true to ourſelves; ſo that the apoſtle had great reaſon to aſcribe the efficacy of temptation to the irregular deſires and vicious inclinations of men, rather than

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to thoſe temptations which the providence of GOD permits them to be aſſaulted with, and conſequently to lay the blame of mens ſins chiefly upon themſelves. SERM. CXVI.

And that chiefly upon theſe two accounts.

Firſt, becauſe the luſts of men are in a great meaſure voluntary.

Secondly, GOD hath put it in our power to reſiſt thoſe temptations, and overcome them. Now ſo far as the luſts of men are voluntary, it is their own fault that they are ſeduced by them, and if GOD hath put it in our power to reſiſt and overcome temptations, we may blame ourſelves, if we be overcome and foiled by them.

Firſt, the luſts of men are in a great meaſure voluntary. By the luſts of men, I mean their irregular deſires and vicious inclinations. I grant that the nature of man is very much corrupted, and degenerated from its primitive integrity and perfection: but we who are chriſtians, have received that grace in baptiſm, whereby our natures are ſo far healed, as if we be not wanting to ourſelves, and do not neglect the means which GOD hath appointed to us, we may mortify our luſts, and live a new life; ſo that if our luſts remain unmortified, we ourſelves are in fault, much more if they gain new ſtrength, and proceed to habits; for this could not be, if we did not after we come to age, and are able to diſcern beween, and to chooſe good and evil, voluntarily conſent to iniquity, and by wilful and deliberate practice of known ſins, improve the evil inclinations of our nature into vicious habits: but if inſtead of mortifying and ſubduing the evil propenſions of our nature (which is no very difficult work to moſt perſons, if they begin

SERM CXVI.

gin it betimes) we will cherish and give new life and power to them, we forfeit the grace which we received in baptism, and bring ourselves again under the power and dominion of sin; and no wonder then, if our lusts seduce us, and make us ready to comply with the temptations of the world and the devil.

Nay, and after this it is still our own fault, if we do not mortify our lusts; for if we would hearken to the counsel of GOD, and obey his calls to repentance, and sincerely beg his grace and HOLY SPIRIT to this purpose, we might yet recover ourselves, and "by the SPIRIT mortify the lusts of the flesh;" for tho' we have left GOD, he hath not quite forsaken us, but is ready to afford his grace again to us, tho' we have neglected and abused it, and to give his HOLY SPIRIT to those that ask him, tho' they have forfeited it, so that tho' our lusts spring from something which is natural, yet that they live and have dominion over us, is voluntary, because we might remedy it if we would, and make use of those means which GOD in the gospel offers to us.

Secondly, GOD hath put it in our power to resist these temptations, and overcome them; so that it is our own fault, if we yield to them, and be overcome by them.

It is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations; and the grace of GOD, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourselves, puts it in our power to resist any temptation that may happen to us.

First, it is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations. If we do but make use of our natural reason, and those considerations which are common and obvious to men, we may easily resist the

the temptations to a great many ſins. Some ſins are ſo horrid in their nature, that when we have the ſtrongeſt temptations to them; we cannot but have a natural averſion from them; as deliberate murder, the danger and guilt whereof, are both ſo great, as make it eaſy for any conſiderate man to reſiſt the ſtrongeſt temptation to it, even that of revenge. A plain act of injuſtice, whether by great fraud, or by downright oppreſſion, is ſo baſe and diſgraceful, ſo odious and abhorred by humane nature, that it is not difficult to a man that hath but a common underſtanding, and common inclination to be honeſt, to overcome the greateſt temptation of gain and advantage; nay he muſt offer conſiderable violence to his nature and reaſon, to bring himſelf to it at firſt. Prophaneneſs and contempt of GOD and religion is ſo monſtrous a fault, and of ſo dreadful an appearance, that every man that will but uſe his reaſon, can have no temptation to it, either from gratifying his humour, or pleaſing his company, or ſhewing his wit, that can be of equal force with the arguments which every man's mind and conſcience is apt to ſuggeſt to him againſt it.

Nay, there are many ſins much inferior to theſe, the temptations whereto may by the ordinary reaſons and conſiderations of prudence and intereſt, be baffled and put out of countenance. To inſtance in common ſwearing, to which I think there is no temptation, either from pleaſure or advantage, but only from faſhion and cuſtom. Now this temptation is eaſy to be conquer'd, by conſidering that every man that profeſſeth to believe the bible, muſt acknowledge it to be a ſin; and if any man be con-

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SERM. CXVI.

vinc'd that it is a sin, I dare undertake to convince him that he can leave it. He that can choose at any time whether he will speak or not (which it is certainly in every man's power to do) can choose whether he will swear when he speaks. If he says he does it by custom and habit, and when he does not think of it; a very little care and resolution will in a short time cure any man of that custom; so that it is naturally in every man's power, to break off this sin.

Secondly, the grace of GOD puts it into our power, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourselves, to resist any temptation that may happen to us; and what the grace of GOD puts into our power, is as truly in our power, as what we can do ourselves. GOD offers his grace to every man under the gospel, for he has promised "to give his HOLY SPIRIT "to them that ask him," and it is naturally in every man's power to ask it, otherwise the promise signifies nothing; for if no man can ask the SPIRIT of GOD, till he first have it, then to promise it to them that ask it, is to promise it to them who have it already, and then 'tis needless to ask it. And if GOD offers his grace to every man, then 'tis every man's fault if he have it not; and every man that hath it, may by the ordinary assistance of that grace, resist any ordinary temptation. And if at any time GOD suffers good men to be assaulted, he hath promised in such cases an extraordinary grace and assistance: and that either "he will not suffer us to be "tempted above what we are able, or that with the "temptation he will find a way to escape, that we "may be able to bear it."

And thus I have done with the second thing I propounded to speak to from these words, that every

every man is his own greateſt tempter. "Every "man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his "own luſt and enticed." And now the proper inferences from what I have been all this while diſcourſing to you, are theſe three.

Firſt, not to think to excuſe ourſelves, by laying the blame of our ſins upon the temptation of the devil. That the devil tempts us is not our fault, becauſe we cannot help it; but it is our voluntary compliance with his temptations, our conſenting to that evil which he ſolicits us to, which maketh us guilty. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of "his own luſts;" the luſts of our own hearts give the efficacy to the temptations of the devil: men many times ſin upon the motions and ſuggeſtions of the devil: but tho' he be guilty of tempting us, we are guilty of conſenting to his temptations.

Many times we are not ſure that the devil tempts us to ſuch a ſin, but we are ſure that we commit it, and conſequently that we are guilty of it. Nay it is certain, if there were no devil, many would be wicked, and perhaps not much leſs wicked than they are. The luſts and vicious inclinations of men would yield to the temptations of the world, tho' there were none to manage them, and to ſet them on to the greateſt advantage; ſo that we cannot excuſe our faults upon this account, that we are tempted by the devil. If this were a ſufficient excuſe for us, the devil would take no pleaſure in tempting us; the whole deſign of his temptation being to make us guilty, and by the guilt of ſin to make us miſerable.

Secondly, from hence we learn what reaſon we have to pray to GOD, that he would "not lead

SERM. CXVI.

" us into temptation," i. e. not permit us to fall into it; for in the phrase of scripture, GOD is many times said to do those things, which his providence permits to be done. The best of us have some remainders of lust, some irregular desires and appetites, which will be apt to betray us to sin, when powerful temptations are presented to us; so that it is a great happiness to the best of men, to be kept by the providence of GOD out of the way of violent temptations; for our own strength to resist them is but small, and we are apt to be secure, and to neglect our guard; we are easy to be surprized, and in continual danger through our own weakness or carelessness. Our greatest security is, if we be sincere, and heartily desirous to do well, and firmly resolved against sin, and do depend upon GOD for his grace and assistance, that his providence will not suffer us to fall into the hands of dangerous and violent temptations, which probably would be too hard for us; he who knows what our strength is, " will not suffer us to be tempted above what " we are able."

Thirdly, from hence we may learn the best way to disarm temptations, and to take away the power of them, and that is, by mortifying our lusts, and subduing our vicious inclinations. When this is done, (which by the grace of GOD may be done) temptation hath lost its greatest advantage upon us. 'Tis the conspiracy of our lusts, with the temptations that set upon us, that betrays us into their power. The true reason why men fall into sin, is not because they are tempted, but because there is something within them, which inclines and disposes them to comply with the temptation, and to yield to it. It is

said,

ſaid, when the devil came to our SAVIOUR to tempt him, that "he found nothing in him," and therefore his temptations had no force upon him. The more we mortify our luſts, the leſs the devil will find in us, for his temptations to work upon. Every ſpark is dangerous, when it falls upon combuſtible matter; but tho' ſparks fly never ſo thick, there is no danger, ſo long as there is nothing about us to catch fire. SERM. CXVI.

If we will not be drawn aſide and enticed to ſin, let us mortify our luſts; for ſo far as we are mortified, we are out of the power of temptation.

Men are apt to complain of temptations, that they are too hard for them, and that they are not able to reſiſt them, tho' they pray to GOD continually for his grace to that purpoſe. This indeed is one means very proper and neceſſary to be uſed; but this is not all that we are to do; we muſt break off habits of ſin, and ſubdue our luſts, and keep under our inclinations, and then we ſhall find our ſelves able to reſiſt and encounter temptations with more ſucceſs. And 'till we do this, in vain do we pray for GOD's grace, and depend upon him for ſtrength to overcome the temptations that do aſſault us; for GOD's grace was never deſign'd to countenance the ſloth and negligence of men, but to encourage and ſecond our reſolutions and endeavours of well-doing. If we expect GOD's grace and aſſiſtance upon other terms, we tempt God, and provoke him to leave us to the power of temptations, to be "drawn away and enticed by our "own luſts.

SERMON

SERMON CXVII.

Proving JESUS to be the MESSIAS.

MATTH. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Now when John had heard in prison the works of CHRIST, *he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, art thou he that should come; or do we look for another?* JESUS *answered and said unto them, go and shew John again these things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

SERM. CXVII.

ABOUT the time of our SAVIOUR's appearing in the world, there was a general expectation of a great prince, that should come out of Judea, and govern all nations: this the Gentiles had from the prophesies of the Sibyls, which spake of a great king that was to appear in the world about that time. So Virgil tells us, that the time of Augustus was the utmost date of that prophesy;

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas:

And Suetonius tells us, "that all over the eastern "countries, there was an ancient and constant tra- "dition, that such a prince should spring out of "Judea:" And for this reason it is, that our SAVIOUR is call'd by the prophet, "the expectation "of the nations."

But

SERM. CXVII.

But more especially among the Jews, there was at that time a more lively and particular expectation, grounded upon the predictions of their prophets, of a prince whom they call'd the MESSIAS, or the Anointed; and those who were more devout among them, did at that time wait for his appearance; as it is said of Simeon, that "he waited for the con-"solation of Israel." Hence it was, that when John the baptist appeared in the quality of an extraordinary prophet, "they sent from Jerusalem to "enquire whether he were the MESSIAS?" John i. 19. "The Jews sent priests and levites from Jeru-"salem to ask him, who art thou? and he confes-"sed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the "CHRIST." The Sanhedrim, to whom it belonged to judge who were the true prophets, sent to know whether he was the MESSIAS or not? "he would not "take this honour to himself;" but told them the MESSIAS was just at hand; and the next day, "when "JESUS came to be baptized of him," he bare record, "that he was the SON of GOD, and that he "saw the SPIRIT descending and abiding upon "him."

So that it is plain that he knew him, and bare witness of him, which makes it the more strange that here in the text, "he should send two of his dis-"ciples to enquire," whether he were the MESSIAS or not? "art thou he that should come, or do we "look for another?" that is, art thou the MESSIAS, or not? for so he is call'd in the ancient prophesies of him, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, he that should come, Gen. xlix. 10. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, "till Shiloh come."

For

SERM. CXVII.

For the resolution of this difficulty, it is very probably said by interpreters, and I think there is no reason to doubt of it, that John the Baptist did not send this message for his own satisfaction, but to satisfy his disciples, who were never very willing to acknowledge JESUS for the MESSIAS, because they thought he did shadow and cloud their master. From whence we may take notice, how mens judgments are apt to be perverted by faction and interest; and that good men are too prone to be swayed thereby; for such we suppose the disciples of John to have been; they will not believe their own master, when they apprehend him to speak against their interest; for they knew that they must rise and fall in their reputation and esteem, as their master did. They believed that their master was a prophet, and came from GOD; yet for all that, they could not digest his testimony of CHRIST, because that set him above their master; which they were sagacious enough to perceive, that it tended to the diminution and lessening of themselves. And that this was the thing which troubled them, appears plainly from the complaint which they make to their master, John iii. 26. "The disciples of John came to him and said, he "that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou "bearest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all "men come to him." This troubled them, to see him invade their master's office, and that he began to have more followers than John had; "he bap-"tizeth, and all men come to him."

This prejudice John had endeavoured to root out of their minds, by telling them, that he had always declared that he was not the MESSIAS, ver 28. "You your selves bear me witness, that I said, I "am

SERM. CXVII.

" am not the CHRIST, but that I am ſent before " him." But when he perceived it ſtill to ſtick with them, and that they obſerved all his actions, and the miracles that he wrought, as if they had a mind to pick a quarrel with him (for St. Luke, who relates the ſame ſtory, tells us, that when our SAVIOUR had healed the centurion's ſervant, and raiſed from the dead the widow's ſon at Naim, the diſciples of John ſhewed him all theſe things) I ſay, John Baptiſt perceiving that they watched him ſo narrowly, ſent two of his diſciples to him, that they might receive full ſatisfaction from him.

And St. Luke tells us, that upon their coming to him, he wrought many of his miracles before them, to convince them that he was the true MESSIAS, Luke vii. 21, 22. " And in that ſame hour he cured many " of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil ſpirits; " and to many that were blind he gave ſight;" and then ſaid to the diſciples of John, " go your " way, and tell John what things ye have ſeen and " heard; how that the blind ſee, and the lame " walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, " and the dead are raiſed, and to the poor the goſpel " is preached; and bleſſed is he that is not of- " fended in me."

So that you ſee that the reaſon why John Baptiſt ſent to our SAVIOUR to know whether he was the MESSIAS, was not to ſatisfy himſelf, for he had no doubt of it; but perceiving his diſciples to be ill-affected towards our SAVIOUR, and hearing them ſpeak with ſome envy of his miracles, he ſent them to him, that by ſeeing what he did and hearing

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SERM. CXVII.

what account he gave of himself, they might receive full satisfaction concerning him.]

I have been the longer in the clearing of this, that men upon every appearance of contradiction in the evangelical history, may not be too forward to suspect the truth of it; but may be convinc'd, that if they would but have patience to examine things carefully, they would find that the story does sufficiently vindicate it self; and tho' it be penn'd, with great simplicity, yet there is sufficient care taken, to free it from being guilty of any contradiction to it self.

The occasion of the words being thus cleared, there are in them these two things considerable.

First, what it was that John the baptist sent his disciples to be satisfied about; and that was, whether he was the MESSIAS or not? "now when John "had heard in prison the works of CHRIST, he "sent two of his disciples." The circumstance of his being in prison, seems to be mention'd, to intimate to us the reason why he did not come himself along with them; he sent two of his disciples to him, who said unto him, "art thou he that "should come, or do we look for another?" and then,

Secondly, the answer which our SAVIOUR returns to this message; "JESUS answered and said unto "them, go and shew John again the things which "ye do see and hear; the blind receive their sight, "the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the "deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor "have the gospel preached unto them; and blessed "is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

So

SERM. CXVII.

So that these words contain, first, the evidence which our SAVIOUR gives of his being the true MESSIAS. Secondly, an intimation that notwithstanding all this evidence which he gave of himself, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him; "blessed is he, whosoever is not offended in me."

First, the evidence which our SAVIOUR gives of his being the true MESSIAS, and to prove this, there were but two things necessary.

1. To shew that he was sent by GOD, and had a particular commission from him.

2. That he was the very person of whom the prophets foretold that he should be the MESSIAS.

The first of these he proves by the miracles which he wrought; and the second, by the correspondency of the things he did, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the MESSIAS; the prophesies concerning the MESSIAS were accomplish'd in him.

First, by the miracles which he wrought; "the "blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the "lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the "dead are raised up." Here is a brief enumeration of the several sorts of miracles which our SAVIOUR wrought, and these were a testimony to him that he came from GOD, and was sent and commissioned by him to declare his will to the world. So he himself tells us, John v. 39. "I have a greater wit-"ness than that of John, for the works which the "FATHER hath given me to finish, the same "works that I do, bear witness of me, that the "FATHER hath sent me." Upon the evidence of these miracles, Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, was convinced that he was sent by GOD, John iii. 2.

SERM. CXVII.

" We know that thou art a teacher come from " GOD, for no man can do these miracles that thou " dost, except GOD be with him." Nay his greatest enemies were afraid of his miracles, knowing how proper an argument they are to convince men, John xi. 47. when the chief priests and pharisees were met together in council against him, they concluded, that if he were permitted to go on and work miracles, he would draw all men after him. " What " do we? (say they) for this man doth many mi- " racles; if we let him thus alone, all men will " believe on him." This they said, upon occasion of the great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

And in reason, miracles are the highest attestation that can be given to the truth and divinity of any doctrine; and supposing a doctrine not to be plainly unworthy of GOD, and contrary to those natural notions which men have of GOD and religion, we can have no greater evidence of the truth of it, than miracles; they are such an argument, as in its own nature is apt to persuade and induce belief.

All truths do not need miracles; some are of easy belief, and are so clear by their own light, that they need neither miracle nor demonstration to prove them. Such are those self-evident principles which mankind do generally agree in; others which are not so evident by their own light, we are content to receive upon clear demonstration of them, or very probable arguments for them, without a miracle. And there are some truths, which however they may be sufficiently obscure and uncertain to most men, yet are they so inconsiderable, and of so small consequence, as not to deserve the attestation of miracles;

miracles; so that there is no reason to expect that GOD should interpose by a miracle, to convince men of them. SERM. CXVII.

Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.

But for such truths as are necessary to be known by us, but are not sufficiently evident of themselves, nor capable of cogent evidence, especially to prejudiced and interested persons, GOD is pleased in this case many times to work miracles for our conviction; and they are a proper argument to convince us of a thing that is either in it self obscure and hard to be believed, or which we are prejudiced against, and hardly brought to believe; for they are an argument *à majori ad minus*, they prove a thing which is obscure and hard to be believed, by something that is more incredible, which yet they cannot deny because they see it done. Thus our SAVIOUR proves himself to be an extraordinary person, by "doing such things as never man did;" he convinceth them, that they ought to believe what he said, because they saw him do those things, which were harder to be believed (if one had not seen them) than what he said.

Miracles are indeed the greatest external confirmation and evidence that can be given to the truth of any doctrine, and where they are wrought with all the advantages they are capable of, they are an unquestionable demonstration of the truth of it; and such were our SAVIOUR's miracles here in the text, to prove that he was the true MESSIAS; here are miracles of all kinds, "the blind receive their sight, and the "lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf "hear, and the dead are raised up." For the nature

SERM. CXVII.

ture of them, they are such as are most likely to be divine and to come from GOD, for they were healing and beneficial to mankind. Our SAVIOUR here instanceth in those things which are of greatest benefit and advantage, and which free men from the greatest miseries and inconveniences; the restoring of sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; soundness and health to the lame and the leprous, and life to the dead. And then for the number of them, they were many; not one instance of a kind, but several of every kind, and great multitudes of most of them, and for the manner of their operation, they were publick, in the sight and view of great multitudes of people; to free them from all suspicion of fraud and imposture, they were not wrought privately and in corners, and given out and noised abroad, but before all the people, so that every one might see them, and judge of them; not only among his own disciples and followers, as the church of Rome pretends to work theirs, but among his enemies, "to convince "those that did not believe;" and this not done once, and in one place, but at several times, and in all places where he came, and for a long time, for three years and a half, and after his death, he endowed his disciples and followers with the same power, which lasted for some ages. And then for the quality of them, they were miracles of the greatest magnitude; those of them, which in themselves might have been performed by natural means, as healing the lame and the leprous, and the deaf, he did in a miraculous manner, by a word or a touch, yea, and many times at a great distance. But others were not only in the manner of their operation, but in the nature of the thing unquestionably miraculous,

lous, as giving of ſight to thoſe that had been born blind, and raiſing up the dead to life, as Lazarus, after he had lain in the grave four days; and himſelf afterwards, the third day after he had been buried; which, if there ever was or can be any unqueſtionable miracles in the world, ought certainly to be reputed ſuch. So that our bleſſed SAVIOUR had all the atteſtation that miracles can give, that he came from GOD. And this is the firſt evidence of his being the MESSIAS.

The Jews acknowledge that the MESSIAS when he comes ſhall work great miracles; their own talmud confeſſeth, that "JESUS the ſon of Joſeph and "Mary did work great miracles;" and the hiſtory of the goſpel does particularly relate more and greater miracles wrought by him, than by Moſes and all the prophets that had been ſince the world began; ſo that we may ſtill put the ſame queſtion to the Jews, which they did in our SAVIOUR's time to one another; "when CHRIST cometh," when the MESSIAS whom ye expect comes, "will he do more "miracles than theſe which this man hath done?"

But, ſecondly, this will yet more clearly appear by the correſpondency of the things here mentioned, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the MESSIAS.

Not to mention innumerable circumſtances of his birth, and life, and death, and reſurrection, and aſcenſion into heaven, together with the ſucceſs and prevalency of his doctrine in the world, all which are punctually foretold by ſome or other of the prophets: I ſhall confine myſelf to the particulars here in the text.

Firſt,

SERM. CXVII.

First, It was foretold of the MESSIAS, that he ſhould work miraculous cures. Iſa. xxxv. 4, 5, 6. ſpeaking of the MESSIAS, "he will come and ſave "you; then the eyes of the blind ſhall be opened, "and the ears of the deaf ſhall be unſtopp'd; then "ſhall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue "of the dumb ſing;" this you ſee was fulfilled here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, the text mentions another miracle which is not in the prophet, that "he raiſed the dead;" but if GOD did more than he promiſed and foretold, this is no prejudice to the argument, if all that he foretold was accompliſh'd in him. Beſides, the Jews have a proverb, that GOD is not content to perform barely what he promiſeth, but "he uſually doth ſomething over and above his "promiſe." That the MESSIAS ſhould "heal the "blind, and the deaf, and the lame," Iſaiah propheſied; and GOD makes good this promiſe and prediction to the full; the MESSIAS did not only do theſe, but which is more and greater than any of theſe, "he raiſed the dead to life."

Secondly, it was likewiſe foretold of the MESSIAS, that he "ſhould preach the goſpel to the poor," Iſa. lxi. 1. "The SPIRIT of the LORD GOD is upon "me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach good "tidings unto the meek, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι πτωχοῖς, to "preach the goſpel or good tidings to the poor;" ſo the LXXII render the words; and they are the very words uſed by our SAVIOUR here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, this was no miracle, but it was the punctual accompliſhment of a propheſy concerning the MESSIAS, and conſequently an evidence that he was the MESSIAS. But beſides it had ſomething in it which was very ſtrange to the Jews, and very different

ferent from the way of their doctors and teachers; for the rabbies among the jews would scarce instruct any but for great reward; they would meddle with none but those that were able to requite their pains; the ordinary and poorer sort of people they had in great contempt, as appears by that slighting expression of them, John vii. 48, 49. "Have any of "the rulers of the pharisees believed on him? but "this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." And Grotius upon this text tells us, that the jewish masters had this foolish and insolent proverb among them, that "the SPIRIT of GOD doth not rest "but upon a rich man," to which this prediction concerning the MESSIAS was a direct contradiction: "the SPIRIT of the LORD is upon me, "because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel "to the poor." In old time the prophets were especially sent to the kings and princes of the people: but this great prophet comes to "preach the gospel "to the poor." None have so little reason to be proud as the sons of men, but never was any so humble as the SON of GOD; our SAVIOUR's whole life and doctrine was a contradiction to the false opinions of the world; they thought the rich and great men of the world the only happy persons, but he came "to preach glad tidings to the poor," to bring good news to them whom the great doctors of the law despised, and set at nought; and therefore to confound their pride and folly, and to confute their false opinions of things, he begins that excellent sermon of his with this saying, "blest "sed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of "GOD."

SERM. CXVII.

Thirdly, it was foretold of the MESSIAS, that the world ſhould be offended at him, Iſa. viii. 14. "He ſhall be for a ſtone of ſtumbling, and for "a rock of offence to both the houſes of Iſrael." And Iſa. liii. 1, 2, 3. "Who hath believed our "report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD "revealed? he hath no form nor comelineſs, and "when we ſee him, there is no beauty that we "ſhould deſire him; he is deſpiſed and rejected of "men, and we hid as it were our faces from him; "he was deſpiſed, and we eſteemed him not;" and this likewiſe is intimated in the laſt words of the text, "and bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offend-"ed in me." Intimating, that notwithſtanding the great works that he did among them, which teſtified of him that he came from GOD, notwithſtanding the predictions of their prophets concerning the MESSIAS, were ſo clearly and punctually accompliſh'd in him; yet notwithſtanding all this, they would take offence at him upon one account or other, and reject him and his doctrine; but even this, that they rejected him, and would not own him for their MESSIAS, was another ſign or evidence that he was the true MESSIAS foretold by the prophets; for among other things this was expreſly predicted concerning him, that he ſhould be deſpiſed and rejected of men.

And thus I have done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to; namely, the evidence which our SAVIOUR here gives of his being the true MESSIAS.

Firſt, the many and great miracles which he wrought, prove that he came from GOD. And,

Secondly,

Secondly, the correſpondence of the things he did, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the MESSIAS, declare him to be the true MESSIAS.

I now proceed to the next thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely,

Secondly, an intimation in the text, that notwithſtanding all the evidence CHRIST gave of himſelf, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him and his doctrine. In ſpeaking to which, it will be very proper to conſider,

Firſt, how the poor came to be more diſpoſed to receive the goſpel than others.

Secondly, what thoſe prejudices are which the world had againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion at its firſt appearance, as alſo thoſe which men have at this day againſt the chriſtian religion, and to endeavour to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

Thirdly, how happy a thing it is to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men have againſt religion.

Firſt, how the poor came to be more diſpoſed to receive the goſpel than others; "the poor have the "goſpel preached unto them." Which does not only ſignify that our SAVIOUR did more eſpecially apply himſelf to them, but likewiſe that they were in a nearer diſpoſition to receive it, and did of all others give the moſt ready entertainment to his doctrine: and this our SAVIOUR declares to us in the beginning of his ſermon upon the mount, when he pronounceth the poor bleſſed upon this account, becauſe they were nearer to the kingdom of GOD than others; "bleſſed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of GOD." So likewiſe St. James, chap. ii. ver. 5. "Hath not GOD choſen the poor of this

SERM. CXVII.

"world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, "which he hath promiſed to them that love him?" So that it ſeems the poor were upon ſome account or other in a nearer diſpoſition to receive the goſpel, than the great and rich men of this world. And of this there are three accounts to be given.

Firſt, the poor had no earthly intereſt to engage them to reject our SAVIOUR and his doctrine. The high prieſts, and ſcribes, and phariſees among the Jews, they had a plain worldly intereſt which did engage them to oppoſe our SAVIOUR and his doctrine; for if he were received for the MESSIAS, and his doctrine embraced, they muſt of neceſſity loſe their ſway and authority among the people; and all that which rendred them ſo conſiderable, their pretended skill in the law, and in the traditions and obſervances of their fathers, together with their external ſhews of piety and devotion, would ſignify nothing, if our SAVIOUR and his doctrine ſhould take place. And there are very few ſo honeſt and ſincere, as to be content for truth's ſake, to part with their reputation and authority, and to become leſs in the eſteem of men than they were before. Few are ſo impartial as to quit thoſe things which they once had laid great weight upon, and kept a great ſtir about, becauſe this is to acknowledge that they were in an error, and miſtaken in their zeal, which few have the ingenuity to own, tho' it be never ſo plain to others; and therefore it is no wonder that our SAVIOUR's doctrine met with ſo much reſiſtance from thoſe, who were ſo much concern'd in point of honour and reputation, to make head againſt it. And this account our SAVIOUR himſelf gives us of their infidelity, John v. 44. "How

"can

" can ye believe, which receive honour one of ano- SERM.
" ther, and seek not the honour which cometh of CXVII.
" GOD only?" And chap. xii. 43. " For they
" loved the praise of men more than the praise of
" GOD."

And besides the point of reputation, those that were rich, were concerned in point of interest, to oppose our SAVIOUR and his doctrine; because he call'd upon men " to deny themselves, and to part " with houses and lands, yea and life it self, for his " sake, and for the gospel's," which must needs be a very hard and unpleasant doctrine to rich men, who had great estates, and had set their hearts upon them. Upon this account it is that our SAVIOUR pronounceth it so " hard for a rich man to enter " into the kingdom of GOD;" and compares it with those things that are most difficult, and humanly impossible; " I say unto you, it is easier for " a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than " for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of GOD."

But now the poor were free from these incumbrances and temptations; they had nothing to lose, and therefore our SAVIOUR's doctrine went down more easily with them; because it did not contradict their interest, as it did the interest of those who had great estates and possessions.

Secondly, another reason of this is, that those that are poor, and enjoy little of the good things of this life, are willing to entertain good news of happiness in another. Those who are in a state of present misery and suffering, are glad to hear that it shall be well with them hereafter, and are willing to listen to the good news of a future happiness; and therefore our SAVIOUR, when he had pronounced the

" poor

SERM. CXVII.

" poor bleſſed," Luke vi. 20. adds by way of oppoſition, ver. 24. " But wo unto you that are " rich; for ye have received your conſolation." They were in ſo comfortable a condition at preſent, that they were not much concerned what ſhould become of them hereafter; whereas all the comfort that poor men have, is the hopes of a better condition, *non ſi malè nunc, & olim ſic erit*, that " if it be bad now, it will not be ſo always," and therefore no wonder if the promiſes and aſſurance of a future happineſs be very welcome to them.

Thirdly, if by the poor we do not only underſtand thoſe who are in a low and mean condition as to the things of this world, but ſuch likewiſe as had a temper and diſpoſition of mind ſuitable to the poverty of their outward condition, which our SAVIOUR calls " poverty of ſpirit," by which he means " meekneſs and humility," there is no doubt but that ſuch a frame and temper of ſpirit is a great diſpoſition to the receiving of truth. And that this is included in the notion of poverty, is very plain, both from the words of the propheſy I cited before, Iſa. lxi. 1. " The SPIRIT of the LORD is upon " me, becauſe the LORD hath anointed me to " preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind " up the broken-hearted;" and likewiſe from our SAVIOUR's deſcription of theſe perſons, in one of the evangeliſts, Matth. v. 3. " Bleſſed are the poor " in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of GOD." So that by the poor who are ſo nearly diſpoſed to receive the goſpel, our SAVIOUR intended thoſe, who, being in a poor and low condition in reſpect of outward things, were likewiſe meek and humble in their ſpirits. Now meekneſs and humility are great diſpo-

SERM. CXVII

dispositions to the entertaining of truth. These graces and virtues do prepare the minds of men for learning and instruction; meekness and modesty, and humility, are the proper dispositions of a scholar. He that hath a mean opinion of himself is ready to learn of others; he who is not blinded by pride or passion, is more apt to consider things impartially, and to pass a truer judgment upon them, than the proud and passionate. Passion and pride are great obstacles to the receiving of truth, and to our improvement in knowledge. Passion does not only darken the minds of men, but puts a false bias upon our judgments, which draws them off many times from truth, and sways them that way to which our passion inclines them. A man of a calm and meek temper, stands always indifferent for the receiving of truth, and holds the balance of his judgment even; but passion sways and inclines it one way, and that commonly against truth and reason. So likewise pride is a great impediment to knowledge, and the very worst quality that a learner can have, it obstructs all the passages whereby knowledge should enter into us, it makes men refuse instruction, out of a conceit they need it not. Many men might have known more, had it not been for the vain opinion which they have entertained of the sufficiency of their knowledge. This is true in all kinds of learning, but more especially as to the knowledge of divine things. For GOD loves to communicate himself, and bestow his grace and wisdom upon meek and humble minds. So the scripture tells us, Psal. xxv. 9. "The meek will he "guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach "his ways." And 1 Pet. v. 5. "Be clothed with "humility;

SERM. CXVII.

" humility ; for GOD reſiſteth the proud, and giv-
" eth grace to the humble."

And thus I have ſhewn in what reſpects the poor were more diſpoſed for the receiving the goſpel, than others. I now proceed to the

Second thing, namely, what thoſe prejudices and objections are, which the world had againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion at their firſt appearance; as alſo to enquire into thoſe which men have at this day againſt the chriſtian religion, and to ſhew the weakneſs and unreaſonableneſs of them. I begin,

Firſt, with thoſe prejudices which the world had againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion at their firſt appearance.

Both Jews and Gentiles were offended at him and his doctrine; but not both upon the ſame account. They both took exceptions at him, eſpecially at his low and ſuffering condition ; but not both upon the ſame reaſon. I ſhall begin with the exceptions which the Jews took againſt our bleſſed SAVIOUR and his religion; and I ſhall reduce them all, or at leaſt the moſt conſiderable of them (as I find diſperſed in the hiſtory of the goſpel, and in the Acts of the apoſtles) to theſe ſix heads.

Firſt, the exceptions which they took againſt him upon account of his extraction and original.

Secondly, at the meanneſs of his condition, contrary to their univerſal expectation.

Thirdly, as to his miracles.

Fourthly, his converſation.

Fifthly, the prejudice that lay againſt him from the oppoſition that was made by perſons of the greateſt knowledge and authority among them. And,

Laſtly,

SERM. CXVII.

Lastly, that the religion which he endeavour'd to introduce, did abolish and supersede their ancient religion, as of no longer use and continuance, though it was plain it was at first instituted by GOD.

First, the exceptions which they took at his extraction and original. In relation to this they were offended at three things.

1. That his original was known among them. This you find urged against him, John vii. 27. "We "know this man whence he is, but when the MES-"SIAS comes, no man knows whence he is."

This to be sure was no just exception in reason against him. For what if his extraction were known, might he not be from GOD for all that? They owned Moses for the greatest prophet that ever was, and yet it it was very well known from whence he was.

But they seem to refer to some prophesy of the old testament, which did seem to assert so much. If they meant that his extraction should be altogether unknown; they knew very well, and believed the contrary, that "he was to be of the line of "David, and to come out of Bethlehem." If they referred to that prophesy, that "a virgin should "conceive and bear a son," and so understood that he should be without father; this was really true, tho' they thought that he was the son of Joseph. And if he affirmed that he had no father, he did sufficiently justify it by his miracles; that being as easy to be believed possible by a divine power, as the miracles which he wrought; which yet they could not deny, because they saw them.

2. Another prejudice againſt his extraction, was the meanneſs of his parents and breeding. This you find mentioned, Matth. xiii. 54, 55. "Whence "hath this man this wiſdom, and theſe mighty "works? is not this the carpenter's ſon? is not his "mother called Mary; and his brethren James and "Joſes, and Simon and Judas? and his ſiſters, are "they not all with us? whence then hath this man "theſe things? and they were offended in him." And ſo likewiſe, John vii. 15. "How knoweth this "man letters, having never learned?"

A ſtrange prejudice and moſt unreaſonable. They could not believe him to be an extraordinary perſon, becauſe his parents and relations, his birth and breeding were ſo mean. He had been brought up to a trade, and not brought up to learning: whereas in reaſon, this ought to have been an argument juſt the other way; that he was an extraordinary perſon, and divinely aſſiſted, who all on the ſudden, without the help and aſſiſtance of education, gave ſuch evidence of his great wiſdom and knowledge, and did ſuch mighty works. This could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean; therefore there muſt be ſomething extraordinary and divine in it. Thus another man, who had been free from prejudice, would have reaſoned.

3. The moſt unreaſonable prejudice of all, in reſpect of his extraction, was grounded upon a ſpiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our SAVIOUR was brought up, and they ſuppoſed him to be born; and that was Galilee. John i. 46. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And John vii. 41. "Shall the MESSIAS come out of "Galilee?" And ver. 52. "Search and look, for out "of Galilee ariſeth no prophet." But

SERM. CXVII.

But it seems Nathanael, who was a good man, was easily taken off from this common prejudice, when Philip said to him, "come and see." He bids him come and see the works he did, and then refers it to him, whether he would believe his own eyes, or an old proverb: however it seems the Jews laid great weight upon it, as if this alone were enough to confute all his miracles, and after they had shot this bolt at him; the business were concluded clearly against him. But prudent and considerate men do not use to give much credit to ill-natur'd proverbs; the good or bad characters which are given of countries are not understood to be universally true, and without exception. There is no place but hath brought forth some brave spirits, and excellent persons; whatever the general temper and disposition of the inhabitants may be. Among the Grecians, the Bœotians were esteem'd a dull people, even to a proverb; and yet Pindar, one of their chief poets, was one of them. The Scythians were a barbarous nation, and one would have thought no good could have come from hence; and yet that country yielded Anacharsis an eminent philosopher. The Idumeans were aliens, and strangers to the covenant; and yet Job, one of the best men that ever was, came from thence. GOD can raise up eminent persons from any place; Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and an idolatrous people. Nay, as our SAVIOUR tells us, "he can out "of stones raise up children unto Abraham." The wise GOD, in the government of the world, does not tie himself to our foolish proverbs. It is not necessary to make a man a prophet, that he should be bred in a good air. If GOD sends a man, it matters not from what place he comes.

SERM. CXVII.

Secondly, another head of exception againſt our SAVIOUR, was the meanneſs of his outward condition, ſo contrary to the univerſal expectation of the Jews. The Jews, from the tradition of their fathers, to which they (as the church of Rome does at this day,) paid a greater reverence than to the written word of GOD, were poſſeſt with a ſtrong perſuaſion, that the MESSIAS, whom they expected, was to be a great prince and conqueror, and to ſubdue all nations to them; ſo that nothing could be a greater defeat to their expectations, than the mean and low condition, in which our SAVIOUR appeared; ſo that upon this account they were almoſt univerſally offended at him.

But this prejudice was very unreaſonable. For neither did their prophets foretel any ſuch thing, as the temporal greatneſs of the MESSIAS: but on the contrary moſt expreſly, that "he ſhould be deſpiſed "and rejected of men," that "he ſhould be a "man of ſorrows and ſufferings," and at laſt "be "put to death;" which was directly contrary to what they expected from their ill-grounded tradition.

Thirdly, againſt his miracles they made theſe two exceptions.

1. That he wrought them by magical skill, and by the power of the devil.

Which was ſo exorbitantly unreaſonable and malicious, that our SAVIOUR pronounceth it to be an "unpardonable ſin," and for anſwer to it, appeals to every man's reaſon, whether it was likely "that "the devil ſhould conſpire againſt himſelf, and "aſſiſt any man to overthrow his own kingdom?" for it was plain, our SAVIOUR's doctrine was directly contrary

contrary to the devil's design; and therefore to assist him to work miracles for the confirmation of it, must have been apparently against his own interest, and to the ruin of his own kingdom.

2. They pretended that though he did many great works, yet he gave them no sign from heaven. Matth. xvi. 1. It is said, "they desired him "to shew them a sign from heaven." It seems they expected that GOD should give some immediate testimony to him from heaven; as he did to Elias, when fire came down from heaven, and consumed his enemies; and particularly they expected, that when he was upon the cross, if he were the true MESSIAS, he should have come down and saved himself: and because he did not answer their expectation in this, they concluded him an impostor.

Now what could be more unreasonable? when he had wrought so many other, and great miracles, perversly to insist upon some particular kind of miracle which they fancied? as if GOD were bound to gratify the curiosity of men; and as if our SAVIOUR were not as much "declared to be the SON of GOD, "by rising again from the dead," as if he had "come down from the cross.

Fourthly, as to his conversation, they had these three exceptions.

1. That he used no severity in his habit or diet, took too much freedom, as they thought; "came "eating and drinking;" that is, he freely used the creatures of GOD, for the end for which they were given, with temperance and thanksgiving; and did not lay those rigorous restraints upon himself in these matters, which many, that were esteemed the most religious among them, used to do.

But

SERM. CXVII.

But he plainly ſhews them, that this exception was meerly out of their prejudice againſt him. For if he had come in the way of auſterity, they would have rejected him as well. They were reſolved to find fault with him, whatever he did. Matth. xi. 16. "Whereunto ſhall I liken this generation? John the "baptiſt came neither eating nor drinking, and they "ſay he hath a devil.". He lived in a more auſtere and melancholy way, "he came in the way of "righteouſneſs," uſed great ſtrictneſs and ſeverity in his habit and diet, and this they took exception at. Our SAVIOUR was of a quite contrary temper, and that did not pleaſe them neither. "The ſon of man "came eating and drinking, and they ſay, behold "a wine-bibber, and a glutton." So that let our SAVIOUR have done what he would, he could not have carried himſelf ſo, as to have eſcaped the cenſures of men, ſo peeviſhly and perverſly diſpoſed.

2. That he kept company with publicans and ſinners.

To which exception nothing can be more reaſonable than our SAVIOUR's own anſwer; that he was ſent to be a phyſician to the world, "to call ſinners "to repentance;" and therefore they had no reaſon to be angry, or think it ſtrange, if he converſed with his patients among whom his proper employment lay.

3. They objected to him profaneneſs in breaking the ſabbath, and that ſurely was plain, that "he "could not be of GOD, if he kept not the ſabbath-"day." The truth was, he had healed one on the ſabbath-day.

To this our SAVIOUR gives a moſt reaſonable and ſatisfactory anſwer, that ſurely "it was lawful to do "good

" good on the ſabbath-day ;" that that was but a poſitive inſtitution, but works of mercy are natural and moral duties; and GOD himſelf had declared, that he would have even his own inſtitutions to give way to thoſe greater duties, that are of natural and eternal obligation. " I will have mercy and not ſacri-" fice." And then from the end of the ſabbath; the ſabbath was made for the reſt and refreſhment of man; and therefore could not be preſumed to be intended to his prejudice. " The ſabbath was made " for man: and not man for the ſabbath."

Fifthly, another great prejudice againſt him, was, that perſons of the greateſt knowledge and authority among them, did not embrace his doctrine. John vii. 48. " Have any of the rulers or phariſees " believed on him?" ſo that here was the infallible rule and authority of their church againſt him.

There is no doubt, but the example and authority of our guides ought to ſway very much with us, and overrule us in doubtful caſes; but not againſt plain and convincing evidence; there we ought to follow, " and obey GOD rather than men." There is ſometimes a viſible and palpable corruption in thoſe who are to lead us; they may have an intereſt to oppoſe the truth: and thus it was with the phariſees and rulers at that time; and ſo it hath been among chriſtians in the great degeneracy of the Roman church. The chriſtian religion was never more endangered, nor ever more corrupted, than by thoſe who have been in greateſt authority in that church, who ought to have underſtood religion beſt, and have been the principal ſupport of it. " Men " may err: but GOD cannot." So that when GOD ſends a prophet, or by his word does plainly declare

his

SERM. CXVII.

his will to us, humane example and authority ceaſeth, and is of no force.

The laſt prejudice I ſhall mention, which the Jews had againſt our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, was, that it did aboliſh and ſuperſede their religion, as of no longer uſe and continuance; though it was plain it was inſtituted by GOD.

This had been a very ſpecious pretence indeed, had not this been part of their religion, and had not their own prophets foretold, that the MESSIAS ſhould come and perfect what was wanting and defective in their inſtitution. It is expreſly ſaid in their law, "that GOD would raiſe unto them another prophet, like to Moſes, and that they "ſhould hear him," when he came. So that in truth it was the accompliſhment of all thoſe revelations which were made to the Jews, and did not reprove the jewiſh religion as falſe, but as imperfect: and did not contradict and overthrow; but "perfect and fulfil the law and the prophets."

And thus I have gone over the chief exceptions and offences which the Jews took at our SAVIOUR and his doctrine; and I hope ſufficiently ſhewn the unreaſonableneſs of them. I have not now time to proceed to what remains: but by what hath been ſaid, you may eaſily ſee, upon what ſlight and unreaſonable grounds men may be prejudiced againſt the beſt perſon and things, and yet be very confident all the while that they are in the right. For ſo no doubt many of the Jews, who oppoſed our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, thought themſelves to be. Therefore it concerns us to put on meekneſs, and humility, and modeſty, that we may be able to judge impartially of things, and our minds may be preſerved

preſerved free and indifferent to receive the truths of GOD, when they are offer'd to us: otherwiſe ſelf-conceit and paſſion will ſo blind our minds, and bias our judgments, that we ſhall be unable to diſcern, and unwilling to entertain the plaineſt and moſt evident truths. We ſee here by the ſad example of the Jews, that by giving way to paſſion, and cheriſhing pride and ſelf-conceit, men may be ſo deeply prejudiced againſt the truth, as to reſiſt the cleareſt light, and reject even ſalvation it ſelf, when it is offer'd to them. So that it is not in vain, that the ſcripture ſaith, "let every man be "ſwift to hear, and ſlow to wrath; for the wrath "of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of GOD;" and exhorts us ſo earneſtly, "to receive with "meekneſs the word of GOD, which is able to ſave "our ſouls."

SERMON CXVIII.

The prejudices againſt chriſtianity conſider'd.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

SERM. CXVIII.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

I Have from theſe words propounded to conſider two things.

I. Thoſe prejudices and objections which the world had againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion at their firſt appearance; as alſo to enquire into

3.

SERM. CXVIII.

thoſe which men at this day do more eſpecially inſiſt upon, againſt the chriſtian religion; and to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

II. How happy a thing it is to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men have againſt religion.

I have entred upon the firſt of theſe, the prejudices which the world had againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion. When this great teacher of mankind came from GOD, though he gave all imaginable teſtimony and evidence that he was ſent from heaven; yet the greateſt part of the world, both Jews and Gentiles, were mightily offended at him, and deeply prejudiced againſt him and his doctrine; but not both upon the ſame account.

I have already given you an account of the chief exceptions which the Jews made againſt our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, and have ſhewn the unreaſonableneſs of them.

I proceed now to conſider the principal of thoſe exceptions, which the Gentiles and heathen philoſophers took at our SAVIOUR and his doctrine. I ſhall mention theſe four.

Firſt, that chriſtianity was a great innovation, and contrary to the received inſtitutions of the world.

Secondly, they objected againſt the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the doctrine.

Thirdly, that it wanted demonſtration.

Fourthly, that the low and ſuffering condition of our SAVIOUR was unſuitable to one that pretended to be the SON of GOD, and to be appointed by him for a teacher and reformer of the world. Theſe are the chief exceptions which the heathen, and eſpecially their philoſophers, took at our SAVIOUR and his doctrine.

Firſt,

SERM. CXVIII.

Firſt, that the chriſtian religion was a great innovation, and contrary to the received inſtitutions of the world; and conſequently that it did condemn the religion which had been ſo univerſally received and eſtabliſh'd in the world by ſo long a continuance of time. And no wonder if this made a great impreſſion upon them, and raiſed a mighty prejudice in the minds of men againſt the chriſtian religion; no prejudices being ſo ſtrong as thoſe that are fix'd in the minds of men by education: and of all the prejudices of education, none ſo violent and hard to be removed, as thoſe about religion, yea though they be never ſo groundleſs and unreaſonable. "Hath a nation changed their gods, "which yet are no gods?" intimating to us, that men are very hardly brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, how abſurd ſoever it be. When chriſtianity was firſt propounded to the heathen world, had men been free and indifferent, and not prepoſſeſs'd with other apprehenſions of GOD and religion; it might then have been expected from them, that they ſhould have entertain'd it with a readineſs of mind proportionable to the reaſonableneſs of it. But the caſe was quite otherwiſe, the world had for many ages been brought up to another way of worſhip, and inur'd to rites and ſuperſtitions of a quite different nature. And this ſways very much with men; *ſequimur majores noſtros, qui feliciter ſequuti ſunt ſuos*; as one of the heathens ſaid in thoſe days, "we "follow our anceſtors, who happily follow'd "theirs;" men are hardly brought to condemn thoſe opinions and cuſtoms in religion, which themſelves and their forefathers have always embraced

SERM. CXVIII.

and followed. And wiſe men eſpecially are loth to admit ſo great a change in a matter of ſo great a concernment as religion is. So that this muſt be acknowledged to have been a conſiderable prejudice againſt the chriſtian religion at its firſt appearance. But yet upon a thorough examination, this will not be found ſufficient in reaſon to withhold men from embracing chriſtianity, if we conſider theſe four things.

1. No prudent perſon thinks, that the example and cuſtom of his forefathers obligeth him to that which is evil in itſelf, and pernicious to him that does it; and there is no evil, no danger equal to that of a falſe religion; for that tends to the ruin of mens ſouls, and their undoing for ever. A man might better alledge the example of his forefathers to juſtify his errors and follies in any other kind, than in this, which is ſo infinitely pernicious in the conſequences of it.

2. In a great corruption and degeneracy, it is no ſufficient reaſon againſt a reformation, that it makes a change. When things are amiſs, it is always fit to amend and reform them; and this cannot be done without a change. The wiſeſt among the heathens did acknowledge, that their religion was mixt with very great follies and ſuperſtitions, and that the lives and manners of men were extremely corrupt and degenerate; and they endeavour'd, as much as they could, and durſt, to reform theſe things. And therefore there was no reaſon to oppoſe an effectual reformation, for fear of a change; a change of things for the better, tho' it be uſually hard to be effected, being always a thing to be deſired and wiſhed for.

3. The change which chriſtianity deſign'd, was the leaſt liable to exception that could be, being nothing

thing elſe in the main of it, but the reducing of natural religion, the bringing of men back to ſuch apprehenſions of GOD, and ſuch a way of worſhipping him, as was moſt ſuitable to the divine nature, and to the natural notions of mens minds; nothing elſe but a deſign to perſuade men of the one true GOD, maker of the world, that he is a ſpirit, and to be worſhipped in ſuch a manner as is ſuitable to his ſpiritual nature. And then for matters of practice, to bring men to the obedience of thoſe precepts of temperance, and juſtice, and charity, which had been univerſally acknowledged even by the heathens themſelves to be the great duties which men owe to themſelves and others. And that this is the main deſign of the chriſtian religion, the apoſtle hath told us in moſt plain expreſs words, Tit. ii. 11, 12. "The "grace of GOD, (that is, the doctrine of the goſ- "pel) which hath appeared to all men, and brings "ſalvation, teacheth us, that denying ungodlineſs "and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, and "righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world."

And all that the chriſtian religion adds beyond this, is means and helps for our direction, and aſſiſtance, and encouragement in the diſcharge and performance of theſe duties. For our direction, GOD hath ſent his SON in our nature, to declare his will to us, and to be a pattern of holineſs and virtue. For our aſſiſtance, he hath promiſed the aids of his HOLY SPIRIT; and for our encouragement, he offers to us pardon of ſin in the blood of his SON, and eternal life and happineſs in another world. This is a ſhort ſum and abridgment of the chriſtian religion, and there is nothing of all this that can reaſonably be excepted againſt.

4. GOD,

SERM. CXVIII.

4. GOD, conſidering the prejudice of the heathens againſt chriſtianity, by reaſon of their education in a contrary religion, was ſtrong and violent, was pleaſed to give ſuch evidence of the truth of chriſtianity, as was of proportionable ſtrength and force to remove and conquer this prejudice. He was pleaſed to give teſtimony to the firſt founder of this religion by mighty miracles, and particularly by his reſurrection from the dead: but becauſe the report of theſe things was only brought to the heathen world, and they had not ſeen the things themſelves; therefore he enabled thoſe who were the witneſſes of theſe things to the world, to work as great miracles as he had done. And when they ſaw thoſe who gave teſtimony to our SAVIOUR'S miracles, do as great and ſtrange things themſelves, as they teſtified of him, there was no reaſon any longer to doubt of the truth of their teſtimony. So that though the prejudice of the heathen againſt chriſtianity was very great, yet the evidence which GOD gave to it, was ſtrong enough to remove it. The doctrine of chriſtianity was ſuch as might have recommended itſelf to impartial men, by its own reaſonableneſs: but meeting with violent prejudices in thoſe to whom it was offer'd, GOD was pleaſed to give ſuch a confirmation to it, as was ſufficient to bear down thoſe prejudices.

Secondly, another objection againſt chriſtianity, was the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the doctrine. They expected ſome deep ſpeculations in natural or moral philoſophy; they made full account, a teacher ſent from heaven would have inſtructed them in the profoundeſt points, and diſcours'd to them about the firſt principles of things, and the nature of the ſoul, and

and the chief end of man, with a ſubtilty and elo- SERM. CXVIII.
quence infinitely beyond that of their greateſt ſophiſters, and able to bear down all oppoſition and contradiction: but inſtead of this, they are told a plain ſtory of the life and miracles of JESUS CHRIST, and of his dying upon the croſs, and riſing from the dead, and aſcending into heaven; and a few plain precepts of life; and all this deliver'd without any ornaments of art, or inſinuation of eloquence, to gain the favour and applauſe of thoſe to whom they related theſe things.

But now, this truly conſider'd, is ſo far from being any real objection againſt the chriſtian doctrine, that it is one of the greateſt commendations that can be given of it: for matter of fact ought to be related in the moſt plain, and ſimple, and unaffected manner; and the leſs art and eloquence is uſed in the telling of a ſtory, the more likely it is to gain belief. And as for our SAVIOUR's precepts how plain ſoever they might be, I am ſure they are a collection of the moſt excellent and reaſonable rules of a good life, and the freeſt from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in the world. And can any thing be more worthy of GOD, and more likely to proceed from him, than ſo plain and uſeful a doctrine as this? The language of law is not wont to be fine and perſuaſive, but ſhort, and full of authority. Thus it is among men: and ſurely it is much fitter for GOD to ſpeak thus to men, than for men to one another.

Thirdly, it is objected, that the doctrine of our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles wanted demonſtration; they ſeemed to impoſe too much upon the underſtandings of men, and to deliver things too magiſterially,

SERM. gifterially, not demonſtrating things from intrinſi-
II. cal arguments, but requiring belief and aſſent without proof.

This the apoſtle St. Paul readily acknowledgeth, that in preaching the goſpel to the world, they did not proceed in the way of the heathen orators and philoſophers, 1 Cor. iv. 4. "My ſpeech and my "preaching was not in the enticing words of man's "wiſdom: but in demonſtration of the SPIRIT and "of power;" that is, they did not go in the way of humane eloquence and demonſtration: but yet their doctrine did not want its evidence and demonſtration, though of another kind. They did not go about to bewitch men by eloquence, not to entangle their minds by ſubtle reaſonings, the force of which very few are capable of: but they offered to men a ſenſible proof and demonſtration of the truth of what they delivered, in thoſe ſtrange and miraculous operations, to which they were enabled by the HOLY GHOST. And this was a ſenſible evidence, even to the meaneſt capacity, of a divine aſſiſtance going along with them, and giving teſtimony to them. I appeal to any man, whether the reſurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead, and his aſcending into heaven, be not a clearer demonſtration of another life after this, and more level to the capacities of all mankind, than the fineſt and ſubtileſt arguments that can be drawn from the immaterial nature of the ſoul, its power of reflexion upon itſelf, and independency upon body as to ſome of its operations; which yet are ſome of the chiefeſt arguments that philoſophy affords, to prove the immortality of our ſouls.

Fourthly, the heathens objected, that the low and mean condition our SAVIOUR was unſuitable to one that

that pretended to be the SON of GOD, and to be appointed by GOD to be a teacher and reformer of the world. This to the heathen philoſophers did not only appear unreaſonable, but even ridiculous. So St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. i. 23. "We preach CHRIST "crucified, to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to "the Greeks fooliſhneſs:" to think that a man who appeared in ſuch mean circumſtances, ſhould be fit to reform the world; and one who himſelf was put to death, ſhould be relied upon for life and immortality. SERM. CXVIII.

This objection I have heretofore conſider'd at large, and therefore ſhall now ſpeak but very briefly to it.

Beſides thoſe excellent reaſons and ends which the ſcripture aſſigns of our SAVIOUR's humiliation; as that he might be a teacher and example to us; that he might make expiation for our ſins; that by ſuffering himſelf, he might learn to commiſerate us; that "by death he might deſtroy him that had the "power of death, that is the devil, and might de- "liver thoſe who through fear of death were all "their lives ſubject to bondage;" I ſay, beſides theſe, it was of great uſe that he ſhould live in ſo mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride, and vanity and fantaſtry of the world; and to convince men of theſe two great truths, that GOD may love thoſe whom he afflicts; and that men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented in the midſt of poverty, and reproach, and ſuffering. Had our bleſſed SAVIOUR been a great temporal prince, his influence and example might poſſibly have made more hypocrites and ſervile converts; but would not have perſuaded men one jot more to be inwardly good and virtuous. The great argument which muſt do

SERM CXVIII.

that, muſt be fetch'd, not from the pomp and proſperity of this world, but from the eternal happineſs and miſery of the other. Beſides, had he appear'd in any great power and ſplendor, the chriſtian religion could not have been ſo clearly acquitted from the ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign, which would have been a far greater objection againſt it, than this which I am now ſpeaking to.

Add to all this, that the wiſeſt of the heathen philoſophers did teach, that worldly greatneſs and power are not to be admired, but deſpiſed by a truly wiſe man; that men may be virtuous, and good, and dearly beloved of GOD, and yet be liable to great miſeries and ſufferings; and that whoever ſuffers unjuſtly, and bears it patiently, gives the greateſt teſtimony to goodneſs, and does moſt effectually recommend virtue to the world; that a good man under the hardeſt circumſtances of miſery, and reproach, and ſuffering, is the fitteſt perſon of all other to be the miniſter, and apoſtle, and preacher of GOD to mankind: and ſurely they who ſay ſuch things (which the heathens have done) had no reaſon to object to our bleſſed SAVIOUR his low and ſuffering condition.

As to that part of the objection, that he who promis'd immortality to others could not ſave himſelf from death and ſuffering, conſidering that he who was put to death, reſcu'd himſelf from the power of the grave: it is ſo far from being ridiculous, that nothing can be more reaſonable than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who by riſing from the grave, and conquering death, gave a plain demonſtration that he was able to make good what he promiſed.

I have

I have done with the exceptions which were made againſt our SAVIOUR and his doctrine at their firſt appearance in the world. I proceed in the SERM. CXVIII.

IId Place to conſider the prejudices and objections which men at this day do more particularly inſiſt upon, againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion: and they are many.

Firſt, ſome that relate to the incarnation of our SAVIOUR.

Secondly, to the time of his appearance.

Thirdly, that we have not now ſufficient evidence of the truth of chriſtianity; the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this diſtance, we have not, nor can be expected to have, ſufficient aſſurance.

Fourthly, that the terms of it ſeem very hard, and to lay too great reſtraints upon humane nature.

Fifthly, that it is apt to diſpirit men, and to break the vigour and courage of their minds.

Sixthly, the diviſions and factions that are among chriſtians.

Seventhly, the wicked lives of the greateſt part of the profeſſors of chriſtianity. In anſwer to all which, I do not propoſe to ſay all that may be ſaid, but as briefly as I can to offer ſo much, as may, if not give full ſatisfaction, yet be ſufficient to break the force of them, and to free the minds of men from any great perplexity about them.

As to the firſt, which relates to the incarnation of our SAVIOUR; and the ſecond to the time of his appearance; I know that theſe and moſt of the reſt I have mention'd, were urg'd by the heathen againſt chriſtianity: but they are now more eſpecially inſiſted upon both by the ſecret and open enemies of our religion.

SERM. CXVIII

The objections againſt his incarnation I have elſewhere * conſider'd: and therefore ſhall proceed to the next, viz.

Secondly, as to the time of our SAVIOUR's appearance, it is objected, if he be the only way and means of ſalvation, why did he come no ſooner into the world; but ſuffer mankind ſo long without any hopes or means of being ſaved? this was objected by Porphyry of old, and ſtill ſticks in the minds of men. To this I anſwer.

1. It is not fit for creatures to call their creator to too ſtrict an account of his actions. Goodneſs is free, and may act when and how it pleaſeth; and "as GOD will have mercy on whom he will have "mercy," ſo he may have mercy at what time he pleaſeth, and is not bound to give us an account of his matters. This is much like the objection of the atheiſt againſt the being of GOD; that if there were ſuch an infinite and eternal being, he would ſurely have made the world ſooner, and not have been without all employment for ſo long a duration: ſuch another objection is this againſt our SAVIOUR, that if he had been the SON of GOD, he would have begun this great and merciful work of the redemption of mankind ſooner, and not have delay'd it ſo long, and ſuffer'd mankind to periſh for four thouſand years together.

But it ſeems in the one as well as the other, GOD took his own time, and he beſt knew what time was fitteſt. The ſcripture tells us, that "in the fulneſs of "time, GOD ſent his SON": when things were ripe for it, and all things accompliſh'd that GOD thought requiſite in order to it. In judging of the actions of our

* John i. 14. Sermon xliii.

our earthly governors, thoſe who are at a diſtance from their counſels, what conjectures ſoever they may make of the reaſons of them, will nevertheleſs, if they have that reſpect for their wiſdom which they ought, believe, that how ſtrange ſoever ſome of their actions may ſeem, yet they were done upon good reaſon, and that they themſelves, if they knew the ſecrets of their counſels, ſhould think ſo. Much more do we owe that reverence to the infinite wiſdom of GOD, to believe that the counſels of his will are grounded upon very good reaſon, tho' we do not ſee many times what it is. SERM. CXVIII.

2. It is not true that the world was wholly deſtitute of a way and means of ſalvation before our SAVIOUR's coming. Before the law of Moſes was given, men were capable of being received to the mercy and favour of GOD, upon their obedience to the law of nature, and their ſincere repentance for the violation of it, by virtue of "the lamb that was ſlain from "the foundation of the world." Men were ſaved by CHRIST both before and under the law, without any particular and expreſs knowledge of him. There were good men in other nations, as well as among the Jews, as Job, and his friends alſo, ſeem to have been. In all ages of the world, and "in every "nation, they that feared GOD and wrought righte-"ouſneſs were accepted of him." The ſacrifice of CHRIST which is the meritorious cauſe of the ſalvation of mankind, looks back as well as forward; and GOD was reconcilable to men, and their ſins were pardon'd, by virtue of this great propitiation that was to be made. In which ſenſe perhaps it is, that CHRIST is ſaid to be "the lamb ſlain from the "foundation of the world," Heb. ix. 25, 26. The apoſtle

SERM. CXVIII.

apoſtle intimates to us, that if this ſacrifice which was offered in the laſt ages of the world, had not been available in former ages, "CHRIST muſt have "often ſuffer'd ſince the foundation of the world: "but now hath he appeared once in the concluſion "of the ages, to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of "himſelf."

3. He did appear at that time in which the world ſtood moſt in need of him; when the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles, were ſunk into the greateſt degeneracy both in opinion and practice, and the condition of mankind ſeem'd to be even deſperate and paſt remedy. This was the needful time, when it was moſt ſeaſonable for this great phyſician to come, and ſhew his pity and his skill in our recovery. GOD could have ſent his SON many ages before; but he thought fit to try other ways firſt, and to reſerve this powerful remedy to the laſt; "laſt of all he "ſent his SON."

4. The time of our SAVIOUR's appearing was of all ages of the world the fitteſt ſeaſon for his coming; whether we conſider,

1. That the world was at that time beſt prepared and diſpoſed for receiving the chriſtian religion: or,

2. That this was the fitteſt ſeaſon that ever had been, for the eaſy diffuſing and propagating of this religion. I aſſign theſe reaſons as tending to give men ſome ſatisfaction, why this great bleſſing was delay'd ſo long; it being rather an argument of wiſdom and goodneſs, than of the want of either, to defer things to that time, in which they are moſt likely to have their effect. Not but that perhaps other and better reaſons may be given. To be ſure GOD had very good reaſons for this diſpenſa-

tion,

tion, whether we can hit upon them or not. In the mean time theſe ſeem not to be altogether inconſiderable.

1. That the world was at that time beſt prepared and diſpoſed for receiving the chriſtian religion. All the while our SAVIOUR's coming was delay'd, GOD's providence was diſpoſing things for it, and training up mankind for the entertaining of this great bleſſing. The jewiſh religion was always very burdenſom, but much more towards the expiration of the jewiſh ſtate, partly by the intolerable multitude of external obſervances, which were daily multiplied upon them, under pretence of traditions from their fathers; and partly by reaſon of their ſubjection to the Romans, which made the exerciſe of their religion in many reſpects more difficult.

And the heathen world was in a very good meaſure prepared for chriſtianity, by being civiliz'd. About the time of our SAVIOUR's coming into the world, philoſophy and learning had been ſo diffus'd by the Roman conqueſts, as had brought a great part of the world from barbariſm to civility. Beſides that their philoſophy had this effect upon men, to refine their reaſon, and in a good degree to detect the follies of the heathen idolatry and ſuperſtition.

'Tis true indeed learning and philoſophy flouriſh'd a great while before, in the time of the Grecian empire, and perhaps before that in ſome other nations; and the conqueſts of the Grecians were very ſpeedy and of vaſt extent: but yet they were neither ſo univerſal, nor ſo well ſettled; nor did they propagate their philoſophy and civility together with their conqueſts, as the Romans did. So that there was no age of the world, wherein mankind were ſo generally

SERM. CXVIII.

rally prepared and diſpoſed for the receiving of the goſpel, as that wherein our SAVIOUR appeared.

2. This was likewiſe the fitteſt ſeaſon for the eaſy diffuſing and propagating of the chriſtian religion. The Romans, together with their conqueſts, did very much propagate their language, which made the ways of communication far more eaſy; and by the long and frequent correſpondence of the ſeveral parts of that empire one with another, the ways of travel and paſſage from one country to another were more ready and open. So that no age can be inſtanc'd, in all reſpects ſo convenient for the ſpeedy propagating of a new religion, as that wherein our SAVIOUR appear'd, viz. when the Roman empire was at its height. And it was very agreeable to the goodneſs and wiſdom of the divine providence, that the braveſt and moſt virtuous people in the world (infinitely beyond either the Perſians and Grecians) ſhould be choſen by GOD, as one of the chiefeſt means for the ſpreading of the beſt and moſt perfect revelation that ever GOD made to the world.

Thirdly, it is objected, that we have not now ſufficient evidence of the truth of chriſtianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which at this diſtance, we have not, nor can be ſuppos'd to have, ſufficient aſſurance. To this I anſwer,

1. That men not only may have, but have an undoubted aſſurance of matters of fact, ancienter than theſe we are ſpeaking of; and the diſtance of them from our times creates no manner of ſcruple in the minds of men concerning them. That there was ſuch a man as Alexander the great, and that he conquer'd Darius and the Perſians; that Julius Cæſar

Cæſar invaded our nation, and in ſome meaſure ſubdued it; and that he overcame Pompey in the battle of Pharſalia; and innumerable other things which I might inſtance in, that were done before our SAVIOUR's time, are firmly believ'd without any manner of doubt and ſcruple by mankind, notwithſtanding they were done ſo long ago. So that ancient matters of fact are capable of clear evidence, and we may have ſufficient aſſurance of them. And where there is equal evidence, if we do not give equal belief, the fault is not in the argument, but in the paſſion or prejudice of thoſe to whom it is propoſed.

2. We have every whit as great aſſurance, (nay greater if it can, or needed to be) of the matters upon which the proof of chriſtianity relies, as of thoſe which I have mention'd. The matters of fact, upon which the truth of chriſtianity relies, are, that there was ſuch a perſon as JESUS CHRIST; that he wrought ſuch miracles; that he was put to death at Jeruſalem under Pontius Pilate; that he roſe again from the dead, and was viſibly taken up into heaven; that he beſtowed miraculous gifts and powers upon the apoſtles, to make them competent witneſſes of his reſurrection, and of the truth of that doctrine which they publiſh'd in his name; that accordingly they preach'd the goſpel to the world, and in a ſhort ſpace without any humane advantages did propagate it, and gain entertainment for it in moſt parts of the then known world.

Now theſe matters of fact have the ſame teſtimony of hiſtories, wrote in thoſe times, and conveyed down to us, by as general and uncontroled a tradition, as the conqueſts of Alexander, and Julius

4.

SERM. CXVIII.

Cæſar. So that if we do not afford equal belief to them, it is a ſign that we have ſome prejudice or intereſt againſt the one, more than againſt the other, though the evidence for both be equal. Nay, I go farther, that the evidence for theſe things which are the foundation of chriſtianity, is ſo much the greater, becauſe that which depended upon it, was of far greater concernment to the world, and conſequently mankind were more obliged to ſearch more narrowly into it.

For our SAVIOUR's life, and death, and reſurrection, we have the teſtimony of a great number of eye-witneſſes, who have wrote the hiſtory of theſe things. And though they were truly extraordinary perſons, and gave teſtimony to themſelves by miracles; yet at preſent I deſire no more, but that they be looked upon, as knowing and honeſt relators of what they heard and ſaw; and that the ſame credit be given to them, which we give to Livy, and Arian, and Q. Curtius, for plain events, and matters of fact.

But yet I muſt add withal, that beſides the miracles which they wrought, they gave greater teſtimony of their integrity, than any hiſtorian in the world ever did. For they willingly ſuffer'd the greateſt perſecution and torment, yea and death it ſelf, in confirmation of the truth of what they deliver'd. And for the propagating of the chriſtian religion through ſo great a part of the world, it is evident by the effect beyond all denial.

So that for the matters of fact, upon which the truth of chriſtianity does depend, here is greater, and more advantageous evidence of hiſtory, than for any other matter of equal antiquity whatſoever.

3. As

3. As to the ſubſtance of theſe matters of fact, we have the concurring teſtimony of the greateſt enemies of the chriſtian religion. That there were ſuch perſons as our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles, that they preached ſuch a doctrine, that they wrought ſuch miracles; for this we have the acknowledgment of the Jews, and the teſtimony of the heathen hiſtorians, and particularly of Celſus, and Porphyry, and Julian, who were the particular and moſt learned adverſaries of the chriſtian religion. So that as to the matters of fact, there is no objection againſt them, whatever uſe we may make of them, or whatever conſequences we may draw from them. And I preſume it agreed by all objectors, that if theſe matters of fact be true, they are a ſufficient foundation of the truth of our religion, and we are very unequal to our religion, if we make a doubt of theſe things, which the greateſt enemies of chriſtianity never had the face to deny.

1. And beſides all this, to recompenſe the diſadvantage which we have of thoſe who ſaw the miracles of our SAVIOUR and his apoſtles, we have the *teſtimonium rei*, the evidence of the effects of theſe things to confirm our belief of them; and this is an advantage which the firſt ages of chriſtianity could not have. We ſee our SAVIOUR's predictions of the ſucceſs of his religion in the world, in the propagating and eſtabliſhing of it fully accompliſh'd, notwithſtanding the fierce oppoſition and reſiſtance that was made againſt it by the greateſt powers of the world. We ſee the diſperſion of the Jews in all nations, and the miſery and contempt which they every where ſuffer; and that now for above ſixteen hundred years, they have continued a diſtinct people,

SERM. CXVIII.

and a ſpectacle of the divine juſtice and ſeverity, for rejecting and crucifying the SON of GOD, and for a laſting and ſtanding teſtimony of the truth of our SAVIOUR's prediction, and of the chriſtian religion.

So that though we live at this diſtance from the riſe and beginning of chriſtianity; yet we have the relation of thoſe things, which give confirmation to it, conveyed down to us in as credible a manner, as any ancient matter of fact ever was; and the effects of things remaining to this day, do give teſtimony to the truth of it.

Fourthly, it is objected, that the terms of chriſtianity ſeem very hard, and to lay too great reſtraints upon humane nature. It commands us to mortify our luſts, and ſubdue our paſſions, and "deny ungodlineſs, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and "godly in this preſent world: to be holy in all manner of converſation; to have reſpect to whatever "things are honeſt, and true, and juſt, and virtuous, and of good report; and to deny ourſelves;" and to part with the deareſt enjoyments of this life, "yea, and with life itſelf, for the ſake of CHRIST, "and his goſpel." Now theſe ſeem to be very hard terms to forego all the preſent pleaſures and enjoyments of this life, in hopes of a future happineſs which we are leſs aſſur'd of.

To this I anſwer,

1. That this is a greater objection againſt religion in general, than the chriſtian religion. For natural religion requires of us all the main duties that chriſtianity does, and gives us far leſs aſſurance of the reward of our obedience. Natural religion requires piety, and juſtice, and charity, the due government of our

our appetites and paſſions, as well as chriſtianity does; but does not diſcover to us the rewards of another world, by many degrees ſo clearly, as our LORD and SAVIOUR, who hath "brought life and immortality to light by the goſpel," and by his reſurrection from the dead, and aſcenſion into heaven, hath given us full aſſurance of another life after this, and of a glorious immortality. So that though we have not, nor can have the evidence of ſenſe, for a future ſtate, yet we have all the rational evidence for it, that can be wiſh'd or expected; and much more than men have for thoſe adventures of their lives and fortunes, which they frequently make in the world, and think themſelves reaſonable in ſo doing.

2. The reſtraints which chriſtianity lays upon men, are in the judgment of mankind ſo far from being an objection againſt it, that they are highly to the commendation of it. Nay, it were the greateſt objection that could be againſt our religion, if it did ſet us at liberty from thoſe reſtraints. What can be more to the credit of any religion than to command men to be juſt, and charitable, and peaceable? and what more to the advantage of the profeſſors of it? and on the contrary, what can reflect more upon any religion, than to indulge and allow men in any vice contrary to theſe? it ſhews men are glad to make any thing an objection againſt chriſtianity when they lay hold of that, which if it had been otherwiſe, they would have made ten times more clamour againſt it for the contrary.

3. As for moſt of theſe reſtraints which chriſtianity lays upon us, they are of that nature, ſo much both for our private and publick advantage, that ſetting

ting aſide all conſiderations of religion, and of the rewards and puniſhments of another life, they are really good for us, and if GOD had not laid them upon us, we ought in reaſon, in order to our temporal benefit and advantage, to have laid them upon ourſelves. If there were no religion, I know men would not have ſuch ſtrong and forcible obligations to theſe duties; but yet I ſay, though there were no religion, it were good for men, in order to temporal ends, to their health, and quiet, and reputation, and ſafety, in a word, to the private and publick proſperity of mankind, that men ſhould be temperate, chaſte, and juſt, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind, and obliging to one another, rather than the contrary. So that religion does not create thoſe reſtraints arbitrarily, but requires thoſe things of us, which our reaſon, and regard to our advantage, which the neceſſity and conveniency of the things themſelves, without any conſideration of religion, would in moſt caſes urge us to.

4. As to the caſe of perſecution for religion; beſides that it does not now happen ſo frequently as it did in the beginning of chriſtianity, nay very ſeldom in compariſon, if all things be conſider'd, it cannot be thought unreaſonable, both becauſe religion offers to us, in conſideration of our preſent ſufferings, a happineſs unſpeakably greater than that which we forego for the ſake of religion; and becauſe when it happens, GOD does extraordinarily enable men to go through it with courage and comfort, as we ſee in the examples of the primitive chriſtians, who in great numbers of all tempers and ages, did volunarily chooſe to give up themſelves to theſe ſufferings, when there was no neceſſity laid upon them,

but

but fair terms of retreat were offer'd to them by their enemies. It is one thing when a man ſuffers by the law, and cannot help it; and another thing when men may avoid ſuffering. In the former caſe men ſubmit to neceſſity, and bear it as well as they can; in the latter caſe, if men ſuffer, it is a ſign they firmly believe the reward of it; and if they ſuffer chearfully, and with joy, as moſt of the martyrs did, it is a plain evidence that GOD affords them extraordinary ſupport in their ſufferings; and then the caſe is not very hard, when religion puts them upon nothing, but what it gives them cauſe, and enables them, to rejoice in the doing of it.

Fifthly, it is objected; that the chriſtian religion is apt to diſpirit men, and to break the courage and vigor of their minds, by the precepts of patience, and humility, and meekneſs, and forgiving injuries, and the like. This objection hath made a great noiſe in the world, and hath been urged by men of great reputation, and a deep inſight into the tempers of men, and affairs of the world. It is ſaid to be particularly inſiſted upon by Machiavel, and very likely it may; though I think that elſewhere he is pleaſed to ſpeak with terms of reſpect, not only of religion in general, but likewiſe of the chriſtian religion; and (which ſeems very much to contradict the other) he ſays in the firſt book of his diſcourſes upon Livy, (chap. xi.) that the greatneſs and ſucceſs of Rome is chiefly to be aſcribed to their piety and religion; and that Rome was more indebted to Numa Pompilius for ſettling religion among them, than to Romulus the founder of their ſtate; and the reaſon he gives is much to our preſent purpoſe; for, ſays he, without religion there can be no military diſcipline, religion being

SERM. CXVIII.

being the foundation of good laws and good diſcipline. And particularly he commends the Samnites, who betook themſelves to religion, as their laſt and beſt remedy to make men courageous, nothing being more apt to raiſe mens ſpirits than religion.

But howſoever this objection be, I dare appeal both to reaſon and experience for the confutation of it.

1. To reaſon, and that as to theſe two things.

(1.) That the chriſtian religion is apt to plant in the minds of men principles of the greateſt reſolution and trueſt courage. It teacheth men upon the beſt and moſt rational grounds to deſpiſe dangers, yea and death itſelf, the greateſt and moſt formidable evil in this world; and this principle is likely to inſpire men with the greateſt courage; for what need he fear any thing in this world, who fears not death, after which there is nothing in this world to be feared? and this the chriſtian religion does, by giving men the aſſurance of another life, and a happineſs, infinitely greater than any is to be enjoyed in this world. And in order to the ſecuring of this happineſs, it teacheth men to be holy, and juſt, and to exerciſe a good conſcience both toward GOD and man, which is the only way to free a man from all inward and tormenting fears of what may happen to him after death. "This makes "the righteous man to be (as Solomon ſays) bold "as a lion." Nothing renders a man more undaunted as to death, and the conſequences of it, than the peace of his own mind; for a man not to be conſcious to himſelf of having wilfully diſpleaſed him, who alone can make us happy or miſerable in the

the other world. So that a good man, being ſecure of the favour of GOD, may upon that account reaſonably hope for a greater happineſs after death than other men: whereas a bad man, if he be ſober, and have his ſenſes awakened to a ſerious conſideration of things, cannot but be afraid to die; and be extremely anxious and ſolicitous what will become of him in another world. And ſurely it would make the ſtouteſt man breathing afraid to venture upon death, when he ſees hell beyond it. Poſſibly there may be ſome monſters of men, who may have ſo far ſuppreſs'd the ſenſe of religion, and ſtupified their conſciences, as in a good meaſure to have conquer'd the fears of death, and of the conſequences of it. But this happens but to very few, as the poet tells us in the perſon of an epicurean.

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoſcere cauſas,
Atque metus omnes & inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, ſtrepitumque Acherontis avari.

There are very few that attain to this temper, but at ſome times. So that if vice and wickedneſs do generally break the firmneſs of mens ſpirits; it remains, that nothing but religion can generally give men courage againſt death. And this the chriſtian religion does eminently to thoſe who live according to it; our bleſſed SAVIOUR having delivered us from the fear of death, by conquering death for us, and giving us aſſurance of the glorious rewards of another life.

(2.) Meekneſs, and patience, and humility, and modeſty, and ſuch virtues of chriſtianity, do not in reaſon tend to diſpirit men, and break their true courage, but only to regulate it, and take away the fierceneſs and brutiſhneſs of it. This we ſee in ex-

SERM. CXVIII.

perience, that men of the trueſt courage, have many times leaſt of pride and inſolence, of paſſion and fierceneſs. Thoſe who are better bred, are commonly of more gentle and civil diſpoſitions: but yet they do not therefore want true courage, though they have not the roughneſs and fool-hardineſs of men of ruder breeding. So in a true chriſtian, courage and greatneſs of mind, is very conſiſtent with meekneſs, and patience, and humility. Not that all good men are very courageous; there is much of this in the natural temper of men, which religion does not quite alter. But that which I am concerned to maintain is, that chriſtianity is no hindrance to mens courage, and that *cæteris paribus*, ſuppoſing men of equal tempers, no man hath ſo much reaſon to be valiant, as he that hath a good conſcience; I do not mean a bluſtering, and boiſterous, and raſh courage; but a ſober, and calm, and fixt valour.

2. I appeal to experience for the truth of this. Did ever greater courage and contempt of death appear in all ages, and ſexes, and conditions of men, than in the primitive martyrs? were any of the heathen ſoldiers comparable to the chriſtian legion, for reſolution and courage, even the heathens themſelves being judges? The religion of Mahomet ſeems to be contrived to inſpire men with fierceneſs and deſperateneſs of reſolution, and yet I do not find, but that generally where there hath been any equality for number, the chriſtians have been ſuperior to them in valour, and have given greater inſtances of reſolution and courage, than the Turks have done. So that I wonder upon what grounds this objection hath been taken up againſt chriſtianity, when there is nothing either in the nature of this religion, or from the

the experience of the world, to give any tolerable countenance to it. And ſurely the beſt way to know what effect any religion is likely to have upon the minds of men, is to conſider what effects it hath had in the conſtant experience of mankind. There remains the other two objections, which I mention'd, but I muſt reſerve them to another opportunity.

SERMON CXIX.

The prejudices againſt JESUS and his religion conſider'd.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

SERM. CXIX.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

FROM theſe words I propoſed to conſider theſe two things.

I. The prejudices and objections which the world at firſt had, and many ſtill have, againſt our bleſſed SAVIOUR and his religion.

II. That it is a great happineſs to eſcape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion.

I have conſidered thoſe objections which the Jews and heathen philoſophers made againſt our SAVIOUR and his religion: and,

II. Thoſe which at this day are inſiſted upon by the ſecret and open enemies of our religion. And I mentioned ſeven, the two laſt of which I ſhall now ſpeak to.

SERM. CXIX.

Sixthly, it is objected that there are many diviſions and factions among chriſtians. This I confeſs is a great reproach and ſcandal to our religion: but no ſufficient argument againſt it. And,

1. To leſſen and abate the force of this objection, it is to be conſider'd, that a very great part of the diviſions that are among thoſe that are call'd chriſtians, are about things that do not concern the eſſentials of chriſtianity, and therefore they are no argument that chriſtianity is not true, becauſe they bring no ſuſpicion of doubt and uncertainty upon the fundamentals of chriſtianity, which all agree in, though they differ in other things. 'Tis true indeed they are very undecent, and contrary to the nature and precepts of the chriſtian religion, which above any religion in the world does ſtrictly require love and unity. They take off much from the ſtrength and beauty of religion: but do by no means deſtroy the truth of it.

2. How many and great ſoever they may be, yet they can with no colour of reaſon be imputed to the chriſtian religion, as giving any cauſe or encouragement to them, however by accident it may be the occaſion of them. For no man doubts but that the beſt things in the world may be perverted by bad men, and made an occaſion of a great deal of miſchief in the world, and yet be very innocent of all that miſchief. No man can deny but that chriſtianity does ſtrictly enjoin love, and peace, and unity among all the members of that profeſſion; and ſo far as chriſtians are factious and unpeaceable, ſo far they are no chriſtians. So that a man may as well except againſt philoſophy, becauſe of the differences that were among the philoſophers, and ſay there was

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no truth among them, because they were not all agreed in all things; as call the truth of christianity in question, for the differences that are among christians. Nay, a man might every whit as well except against laws and government; because, notwithstanding them, there are frequent seditions and rebellions, infinite suits and controversies occasion'd even by the very laws: but no man was ever so unreasonable as to think this a good reason against laws and government. SERM. CXIX.

3. The divisions of christians are so far from being an argument against christianity, that on the contrary, they are an argument that men should embrace christianity more heartily, and make more conscience of obeying the precepts of it. And if they did this, the greatest part of those contentions and uncharitable animosities which are among them would presently cease. If the christian religion were truly entertained, and men did seriously mind the precepts of it, and give up themselves to the obedience of its laws, differences would not be easily commenced, nor so vehemently prosecuted, nor so pertinaciously continued in, as they are. Men would not, upon every slight reason, and little doubt and scruple, rend and tear the body of CHRIST in pieces, and separate themselves from the communion of the church they live in, and in which they were baptized and received their christianity.

If men seriously consider'd, and truly understood what they do, when they divide the church of CHRIST upon little scruples and pretences, they would hardly be able to think themselves christians, whilst they continued in these unchristian and uncharitable practices.

If

SERM. CXIX.

If men would but be, or do what chriſtianity requires, there would be no occaſion for this objection; and if men will not, chriſtian religion is not to be blamed for it, but thoſe that act ſo contrary to the plain precepts and directions of it. I proceed to the

Seventh and laſt objection, the vicious and wicked lives of a great part of the profeſſors of chriſtianity. This is a heavy objection indeed, and ſuch an one, that though we may juſtly be aſhamed to own the truth of it, yet can we not have the face to deny it. 'Tis ſo ſad a truth, that it is enough to confound us, and to fill all our faces with ſhame and bluſhing: but yet it is an objection not ſo ſtrong againſt chriſtianity, as it is ſhameful to chriſtians. And notwithſtanding the utmoſt force of it, we have no cauſe to be aſhamed of the goſpel of CHRIST; but the goſpel of CHRIST may juſtly be aſhamed of us. For whatever we be, "the goſpel of CHRIST is the power of GOD unto "ſalvation." The natural tendency of it is to reform and ſave men, and "the wrath of GOD is "therein revealed againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, however they may detain "the truths of GOD in unrighteouſneſs," and not ſuffer them to have their due and proper influence upon their hearts and lives.

But that I may give a more clear and particular anſwer to it, I deſire you to attend to theſe following conſiderations.

1. It cannot be denied, but that chriſtianity hath had once very great and marvellous effects upon the hearts and lives of men. And for this I appeal to the lives and manners of the primitive chriſtians, for which we have not only the teſtimony of our own

own books and writers, but even of the adversaries of our religion. What reformation christianity at first wrought in the manners of men, we have clear and full testimony, from what the apostles wrote concerning the several churches which they planted in several parts of the world. What hearty unity and affection there was among christians; even to that degree, as to make men bring in their private estates and possessions for the common support of their brethren, we may read in the history of the Acts of the apostles. The city of Corinth, by the account which Strabo gives of it, was a very vicious and luxurious place, as most in the world; and yet we see by St. Paul, what a strange reformation the christian religion made in the lives and manners of many of them; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor "idolaters, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of GOD. And "such were some of you: but ye are washed, but "ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name "of the LORD JESUS, and by the SPIRIT of our "GOD.". And surely it is no small matter to reclaim men from such a profligate course of life. The apostle instanceth in crimes and vices of the first rate, from which yet he tells us many were cleansed and purified "by the name of the LORD JESUS, "and the SPIRIT of GOD;" that is, by the power and efficacy of the christian doctrine, together with the co-operation of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT. SERM. CXIX.

After the apostles, the ancient fathers, in their apologies for christianity, give us a large account of the great power and efficacy of the christian doctrine upon

SERM. CXIX.

upon the lives and manners of men. Tertullian tells the Roman governors, that their priſons were full of malefactors, committed for ſeveral crimes; but they were all heathens. *De veſtris ſemper æſtuat carcer*, "their priſons were thronged with criminals of their "own religion:" but there were no chriſtians to be found committed there for ſuch crimes; *Nemo illic chriſtianus, niſi hoc tantùm*, &c. "There were "no chriſtians in their priſons, but only upon ac- "count of their religion." Or if there were any malefactors that had been chriſtians, they left their religion when they fell into thoſe enormities. And afterwards he adds, that if chriſtians were irregular in their lives, they were no longer accounted chriſtians, but were baniſh'd from their communion as unworthy of it. And they appealed to the heathens, what a ſudden and ſtrange change chriſtianity had made in ſeveral of the moſt lewd, and vicious, and debauched perſons, and what a viſible reformation there preſently appeared in the lives of the worſt of men, after they had once entertained the chriſtian doctrine.

And theſe teſtimonies are ſo much the ſtronger, becauſe they are publick appeals to our adverſaries, which it is not likely they who were ſo perſecuted and hated as the chriſtians were, would have had the confidence to have made, if they had not been notoriouſly true, even the enemies themſelves being judges.

And that they were ſo, we have the confeſſion of the heathens themſelves. I ſhall produce two remarkable teſtimonies to this purpoſe, and one of them from the pen of one of the bittereſt enemies that the chriſtian religion ever had.

Pliny,

SERM. CXIX.

Pliny, in his epistle to Trajan the emperor, gives him an account, "that having examined the christi- "ans, setting aside the superstition of their way, "he could find no fault; and that this was the "sum of their error, that they were wont to meet "before day, and sing a hymn to CHRIST, and "to bind themselves by solemn oath or sacrament, "not to any wicked purpose, but not to steal, nor "rob, nor commit adultery, nor break their faith, "nor detain the pledge." So that it seems the sum of their error was, to oblige themselves in the strictest manner against the greatest vices and crimes. Which methinks is a great testimony from an enemy and a judge, one who would have been ready to discover their faults, and had opportunity of enquiring into them.

My other witness is Julian the emperor and apostate, who in one of his epistles tells us, "the "christians did severely punish sedition and im- "piety." And afterwards exhorting the heathen priests to all offices of humanity, and especially alms towards the poor; he tells them, they ought to be more careful in this particular, and to mend this fault; "because (says he) the Galileans taking advantage "of our neglect in this kind, have very much "strengthned their impiety (for so he calls their "religion) by being very intent upon these offices, "and exemplary in their charity to the poor, where- "by they gained many over to them."

And in his 49th epistle to Arsacius the high-priest of Galatia, he recommends to him, among other means for the advancement of paganism, the building of hospitals, and great liberality to the poor, not only of their own religion, but others.

SERM. CXIX.

" For, ſays he, it is a ſhame that the impious Ga-
" lileans ſhould not only maintain their own poor,
" but ours alſo; wherefore let us not ſuffer them
" to outdo us in this virtue." Nothing but the force of truth could have extorted ſo full an acknowledgment of the great humanity and charity of the chriſtians, from ſo bitter an enemy of our religion as Julian was. If he owned it, we may be ſure it was very great and exemplary.

So that you ſee that the chriſtian religion had a very great power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men when it firſt appeared in the world. And the true ſpirit and genius of any religion, the force of any inſtitution is beſt ſeen in the primitive effects of it; before it be weakened and diſpirited by thoſe corruptions, which in time are apt to inſinuate themſelves into the beſt things. For all laws and inſtitutions are commonly more vigorous, and have greater effects at firſt, than afterwards; and the beſt things are apt in time to degenerate and to contract ſoil and ruſt. And it cannot in reaſon be expected otherwiſe. So that though it be a thing to be bewailed, and by the greateſt care and diligence to be reſiſted, yet it is not ſo extremely to be wonder'd at, if chriſtianity, in the ſpace of ſixteen hundred years, hath abated much of its firſt ſtrength and vigor.

Eſpecially conſidering, there were ſeveral circumſtances, that gave chriſtianity mighty advantages at firſt, eſpecially the miraculous powers which did accompany the firſt publication of the goſpel; which muſt needs be full of conviction to thoſe who ſaw the wonderful effects of it: the extraordinary operation of the SPIRIT of GOD upon the minds of men,

men, to dispose them to the receiving of it: the persecuted and suffering state that christians were generally in, which made those who embraced the profession to be generally serious and in good earnest in it, and kept up a continual heat and zeal in the minds of men for that religion which cost them so dear, and for which they suffer'd so much: and the fury of their enemies against it, did naturally inflame their love and kindness to one another; nothing being a greater endearment among men, than common sufferings in a common cause. So long as christians were not corrupted by secular interests; and by denying all for CHRIST, were free from covetousness and ambition, the great roots of all evil, the church of CHRIST, "though she was "black, yet she was comely, and terrible as an "army with banners;" she was all this while in an excellent posture to resist the temptations, and fight against the vices and corruptions of the world: but after the world broke in upon the church, and christianity was countenanced by the powers of the world, and water'd with secular preferments and encouragements, no wonder if the tares began to grow up with the wheat: then "iniquity began to "abound, and the love of many began to grow "cold." When the sun of prosperity began to shine upon the christian profession, then no wonder if the vermin bred and swarmed every where. When it grew creditable and advantageous for men to be christians, this must in all reason make a world of hypocrites and counterfeit professors. SERM. CXIX.

These things, I reckon, must in reason make a mighty difference between the first ages of christianity, and those which have follow'd since; and

SERM. CXIX.

no wonder, if the real fruits and effects of religion in theſe ſeveral ſtates of chriſtianity be very unequal. For proſperity and adverſity made a wide difference in this matter. The perſecution of any religion naturally makes the profeſſors of it real; and the proſperity of it does as naturally allure and draw in hypocrites. Beſides that even the beſt of men are more corrupted by proſperity than affliction.

But tho' chriſtians were beſt under perſecution, yet GOD did not think fit always to continue them in that ſtate, becauſe he would not tempt them and tire them out with perpetual ſufferings; and after he had given the world a ſufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of the chriſtian religion, in maintaining and propagating it ſelf in deſpite of all the violence and oppoſition of the world, ſufficient for ever to give reputation to it; he then thought good to leave it to be kept up by more humane ways, and ſuch as offer leſs violence to the nature of a man. Being once eſtabliſh'd and ſettled in the world, and upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, GOD left it to be ſupported by more ordinary means; by pious education, and diligent inſtruction, and good laws and government, without miracles, and without perſecution, and without thoſe extraordinary and overpowering communications of his grace and SPIRIT which he afforded to the firſt ages of chriſtianity.

I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that men may ſee what effects chriſtianity hath had upon the lives of men, by which we may ſee the proper nature and efficacy of it; and withal may not wonder ſo much that it hath not the ſame effects now. Though it be matter of great ſhame to us, that they

they are ſo vaſtly diſproportionable to what they were at firſt. SERM. CXIX.

2. Though the diſproportion be very great between the effects of chriſtianity at firſt, and what it hath now upon the lives of men; yet we ought not to deny, but it hath ſtill ſome good effects upon mankind; and it is our great ſhame and fault that it hath no better. If we will ſpeak juſtly of things, as to the general civility of life and manners, freedom from tyranny, and barbarouſneſs, and cruelty, and ſome other enormous vices; yea and as to the exemplary piety and virtue of great numbers of particular perſons of ſeveral nations, there is no compariſon between the general ſtate of chriſtendom, and the pagan and mahometan parts of the world. Next to chriſtianity, and the law of Moſes, (which was confined to one nation) philoſophy was the moſt likely inſtrument to reform mankind that hath been in the world; and it had very conſiderable effects upon ſome particular perſons, both as to the rectifying of their opinions, and the reforming of their lives: but upon the generality of mankind it did very little in either of theſe reſpects, eſpecially as to the rectifying of the abſurd and impious opinions of the people concerning GOD, and their ſuperſtitious worſhip of the deity. Whereas the chriſtian religion did univerſally, wherever it came, ſet men free from thoſe groſs impieties and ſuperſtitions, and taught men to worſhip the only true GOD in a right manner.

Though we muſt confeſs to the eternal reproach of the chriſtian religion, that the weſtern church hath degenerated ſo far, that it ſeems to be in a great meaſure relaps'd into the ignorance and ſuperſtition

SERM. CXIX.

ſtition of paganiſm; out of which degeneracy, that GOD hath reſcued us, we have infinite cauſe to adore his goodneſs, ſo we have all the reaſon in the world to dread and deteſt a return into this ſpiritual Egypt, this houſe of darkneſs and bondage, and the bringing of our necks again under "that yoke, which "neither we nor our fathers were able to bear."

So that you ſee that there are ſtill very conſiderable effects of the chriſtian religion in the world, yea and I doubt not but in thoſe places where it is moſt corrupted and degenerated; becauſe they ſtill retain the eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity, which have not quite loſt their force, notwithſtanding the many errors and corruptions that are mixt with them. And as GOD knows, and every man ſees it, that the generality of chriſtians are very bad, notwithſtanding all the influence of that excellent religion which they profeſs; yet I think it is very evident, men would be much worſe without it. For though very many who have entertained the principles of chriſtianity are very wicked in their lives; yet many are otherwiſe: and thoſe that are bad have this advantage by their religion, that it is in its nature apt to reduce and recover men from a wicked courſe, and ſometimes does: whereas the caſe of thoſe perſons would have been deſperate, were it not for thoſe principles of religion which were implanted in them by chriſtian education, and though they were long ſuppreſs'd, yet did at laſt awaken them to a conſideration of their condition, and proved the happy means of their recovery.

3. I will not deny but there are ſome perſons as bad, nay perhaps worſe, that have been bred up in the chriſtian religion, than are commonly to be found

found in the darkneſs of paganiſm; for the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt, and thoſe who have reſiſted ſo great a light as that of the goſpel is, are like to prove the moſt deſperately wicked of all others. There is nothing that men make worſe uſe of, than of light and liberty, two of the beſt and moſt pleaſant things in the world. Knowledge is many times abuſed to the worſt purpoſe, and liberty into licentiouſneſs and ſedition; and yet no man for all that thinks ignorance deſirable, or would wiſh a perpetual night and darkneſs to the world; and conclude from the inconveniencies of abuſed liberty, that the beſt ſtate of things would be, that the generality of mankind ſhould be all ſlaves to a few, and be perpetually chained to the oar, or condemned to the mines. SERM. CXIX.

There are many times as bad conſequences of good things, as of bad: but yet there is a great difference between good and bad for all that. As knowledge and liberty, ſo likewiſe the chriſtian religion is a great happineſs to the world in general, though ſome are ſo unhappy as to be the worſe for it; not becauſe religion is bad, but becauſe they are ſo.

4. If religion be a matter of mens free choice, it is not to be expected that it ſhould neceſſarily and conſtantly have its effects upon men; for it works upon us not by way of force or natural neceſſity, but of moral perſuaſion. If religion, and the grace of God which goes along with it, did force men to be good and virtuous, and no man could be ſo unleſs he were thus violently forced, then it would be no virtue in any man to be good, nor any crime and fault to be otherwiſe. For then the reaſon why ſome men were good, would be becauſe

SERM. CXIX.

cauſe they could not help it; and others bad, becauſe the grace of GOD did not make them ſo whether they would or not.

But religion does not thus work upon men. It directs men to their duty by the ſhorteſt and plaineſt precepts of a good life; it perſuades men to the obedience of theſe precepts, by the promiſes of eternal happineſs, and the threatnings of eternal miſery in caſe of obſtinate diſobedience; it offers us the aſſiſtance of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, to help our weakneſs, and enable us to that, for which "we are "not ſufficient of ourſelves:" but there is nothing of violence or neceſſity in all this. After all, men may diſobey theſe precepts, and not be perſuaded by theſe arguments, may not make uſe of this grace which GOD offers, may "quench and re-"ſiſt the HOLY GHOST, and reject the counſel of "GOD againſt themſelves." And the caſe being thus, it is no wonder, if the temptations of this preſent world prevail upon the vicious inclinations of men againſt their duty, and their true intereſt; and conſequently if the motives and arguments of the chriſtian religion have not a conſtant and certain effect upon a great part of mankind. Not but that chriſtianity is apt to bring men to goodneſs; but ſome are ſo obſtinately bad, as not to be wrought upon by the moſt powerful conſiderations it can offer to them.

5. It cannot be denied, but that chriſtianity is as well framed to make men good, as any religion can be imagined to be; and therefore wherever the fault be, it cannot be in the chriſtian religion, that we are not good. So that the bad lives of chriſtians are no ſufficient objection either againſt the truth or good-

SERM. CXIX.

goodness of the christian doctrine. Besides the confirmation that was given to it by miracles, the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its divine and heavenly original. And surely the goodness of any religion consists in the sufficiency of its precepts to direct men to their duty; in the force of its arguments to persuade men to it; and the suitableness of its aids and helps to enable us to the discharge and performance of it. And all those advantages the christian religion hath above any religion or institution that ever was in the world. The reasonable and plain rules of a good life are no where so perfectly collected, as in the discourses of our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles. No religion ever gave men so full assurance of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world; nor such gracious promises of divine assistance, and such evidence of it, especially in the piety, and virtue, and patience, and self-denial of the primitive christians, as the doctrine of GOD our SAVIOUR hath done, "which teacheth men to deny ungodliness "and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righte-"ously, and godly in this present world, in con-"templation of the blessed hope and the glori-"ous appearance of the great GOD, and our SA-"VIOUR JESUS CHRIST; who gave himself for "us, that he might redeem us from all iniqui-"ty, and purify to himself a peculiar people zea-"lous of good works."

6. and lastly, after all that hath or can be said, it must be acknowledged, and ought sadly to be lamented by us, that the wicked lives of christians are a marvellous scandal and reproach to our holy reli-

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SERM. CXIX.

gion, and a great obſtacle to the ſpreading of it in the world, and a real objection againſt it to prejudiced perſons, with whom it doth juſtly bring into doubt the goodneſs and efficacy of the inſtitution it ſelf, to ſee how little effect it hath upon the hearts and lives of men. It is hard for a man to maintain the reputation of an excellent maſter in any kind, when all the world ſees, that moſt of his ſcholars prove dunces. Whatever commendation may be given to any art or ſcience, men will queſtion the truth and reality of it, when they ſee the greateſt part of thoſe who profeſs it, not able to do any thing anſwerable to it. The chriſtian religion pretends to be an art of ſerving GOD more decently and devoutly, and of living better than other men; but if it be ſo, why do not the profeſſors of this excellent religion ſhew the force and virtue of it in their lives? and though I have ſufficiently ſhewn, that this is not enough to overthrow the truth and diſparage the excellency of the chriſtian doctrine; yet it will certainly go a great way with prejudiced perſons, and it cannot be expected otherwiſe.

So that we have infinite reaſon to be aſhamed, that there is ſo plain a contrariety between the laws of chriſtianity, and the lives of the greateſt part of chriſtians; ſo notorious and palpable a difference between the religion that is in the bible, and that which is to be ſeen and read in the converſations of men.

Who that looks upon the manners of the preſent age, could believe, (if he did not know it) that the holy and pure doctrine of the chriſtian religion had ever been ſo much as heard, much leſs pretended to be entertained and believed among us? nay among thoſe who ſeem to make a more ſerious profeſſion

of

of religion, when we consider how strangely they allow themselves in malice and envy, in passion and anger, and uncharitable censures, and evil speaking, in fierce contentions and animosities; who would believe that the great instrument of these mens religion, I mean the holy bible, by which they profess to regulate and govern their lives, were full of plain and strict precepts of love and kindness, of charity and peace, and did a hundred times with all imaginable severity, and under pain of forfeiting the kingdom of GOD, forbid malice and envy, and revenge, and evil speaking, and rash and uncharitable censures, and tell us so plainly that the christian religion obligeth men "to put off all these;" and that "if any man seem to be religious and bridleth "not his tongue, that man's religion is vain?" do men read and hear these things every day, and profess to believe them to be the truths of GOD, and yet live as if they were verily persuaded they were false? what can we conclude from hence, but either that this is not christianity, or the greatest part of us are no christians? SERM. CXIX.

So that if one of the apostles or primitive christians should rise from the dead, and converse among us, how would he wonder to see the face and complexion of christianity alter'd from what it was in their days; and were it not for the name and title which we bear, would sooner guess us to be any thing than christians?

So that upon the whole matter, there is no way to quit our selves of this objection, and to wash away the reproach of it, but to mend and reform our lives. 'Till this be done, it is unavoidable, but the vicious manners of men will affect our religion with

SERM. CXIX.

obloquy and reproach, and derive an ill conceit and opinion of it into the minds of men. And I cannot ſee how chriſtianity can ever gain much ground in the world, 'till it be better adorned and recommended by the profeſſors of it. Nay we have juſt cauſe to fear, that if GOD do not raiſe up ſome great and eminent inſtruments to awaken the world out of this ſtupid lethargy, that chriſtianity will every day decline, and the world will in a ſhort ſpace be overrun with atheiſm and infidelity. For vice, and ſuperſtition, and enthuſiaſm, which are the reigning diſeaſes of chriſtendom, when they have run their courſe, and finiſh'd their circle, do all naturally end, and meet in atheiſm. And then it will be time for the great judge of the world to appear, and effectually to convince men of that, which they would not be perſuaded to believe by any other means. And of this our SAVIOUR hath given us a terrible and fearful intimation in that queſtion of his; "when the ſon of man comes, ſhall he find faith "upon earth?" our SAVIOUR hath not poſitively affirmed it, and GOD grant that we may not make it, and find it true.

And thus I have, by GOD's aſſiſtance, given the beſt ſatisfaction I could, to the moſt material exceptions I have met with againſt our bleſſed SAVIOUR and his religion. The

IId thing remains briefly to be ſpoken to, viz. how happy a thing it is to eſcape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion, "bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in "me." And this will appear if we conſider theſe three or four things.

Firſt, that prejudice does many times ſway and bias

bias men against the plainest and clearest truths. We see in daily experience, what a false bias prejudice puts upon mens understandings. Men that are educated in the grossest errors and superstitions, how hard it is to convince them that they are in a wrong way! and with what difficulty are they persuaded of their mistake! nay they have hardly the patience to be told they are in an error, much less to consider what may be offer'd against it. How do the passions and lusts of men blind them and lead them aside from the truth, and incline them to that side of the question which is most favourable to their lusts and interests? how partially do men lean to that part which makes most for their advantage, though all the reason in the world lie on the other side? SERM. CXIX.

Now ignorance and mistake are a great slavery of the understanding, if there were no worse consequences of our errors: and therefore our SAVIOUR says excellently, that the truth makes men free; "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make "you free."

Secondly, prejudice does not only bias men against the plainest truths, but in matters of greatest concernment, in things that concern the honour of GOD, and the good of others, and our own welfare and happiness. Prejudices against religion occasion mistakes of the highest nature, and may lead men to superstition and idolatry, and to all manner of impiety, nay many times to atheism and infidelity. The prejudices against the doctrine of our SAVIOUR are of another concernment than the prejudices which men have against the writers of natural philosophy or eloquence, or any other humane art or science. If a man's prejudice make him err in these matters

SERM. CXIX.

matters, the thing is of no great moment: but the buſineſs of religion is a matter of the greateſt and weightieſt concernment to mankind.

Thirdly, the conſequences of mens prejudices in theſe things prove many times fatal and deſtructive to them. Men may upon unreaſonable prejudices "reject the counſel of GOD againſt themſelves," as it is ſaid of the chief prieſts and phariſees among the Jews. Men may oppoſe the truth ſo obſtinately and perverſly, as to be "fighters againſt GOD," and to bring certain ruin and "ſwift deſtruction upon "themſelves," both in this world, and the other; as the Jews did, who by oppoſing the doctrine of the goſpel, and perſecuting our SAVIOUR and his diſciples, "fill'd up the meaſure of their ſins, 'till "wrath came upon them to the uttermoſt." It is eaſy to entertain prejudices againſt religion, and by conſidering only the wrong ſide of things, to fortify our prejudices to ſuch a degree, and entrench our ſelves ſo ſtrongly in our errors, that the plaineſt and moſt convincing truths ſhall not be able to have any acceſs to us, or make any impreſſion upon us: but all this while we do in truth undermine our own happineſs, and are ſecretly working our own ruin; and while we think we are oppoſing an enemy, we are deſtroying our ſelves; "for who hath harden'd himſelf againſt GOD" and his truth, "and proſpered?" The principles of religion are a firm and immoveable rock, againſt which the more violently we daſh our ſelves, the more miſerably we ſhall be ſplit and ſhatter'd. Our bleſſed SAVIOUR and his religion have been to many, and are to this day, "a ſtone of ſtumbling, "and a rock of offence;" but he himſelf hath told

us

us what ſhall be the fate of thoſe who are offended at him; "whoſoever ſhall fall on this ſtone, ſhall be "broken; but upon whomſoever it ſhall fall, it ſhall "grind him to powder." And therefore well might he ſay here in the text, "bleſſed is he whoſoever "ſhall not be offended in me."

Fourthly, there are but few in compariſon, who have the happineſs to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion. Thus to be ſure it was when chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world: and though among us the great prejudice of education be removed; yet there are ſtill many, who upon one account or other are prejudiced againſt religion, at leaſt ſo far, as not to yield to the power of it in their lives. Few men are ſo impartial in conſidering things, as not to be ſwayed by the intereſt of their luſts and paſſions, as to keep the balance of their judgments even, and to ſuffer nothing but truth and reaſon to weigh with them. We generally pretend to be "pilgrims and ſtrangers in the world," and to be all travelling towards heaven: but few of us have the indifferency of travellers; who are not concern'd to find out the faireſt and the eaſieſt way, but to know which is the right way, and to go in it. Thus it ſhould be with us, our end ſhould always be in our eye, and we ſhould chooſe our way only with reſpect to that; not conſidering our inclination ſo much as our deſign; nor chooſing thoſe principles for the government of our lives, which are moſt agreeable to our preſent deſires, but thoſe which will moſt certainly bring us to happineſs at the laſt; and that I am ſure the principles of the chriſtian religion, firmly believed and practiſed by us, will do.

Let

SERM. CXIX.

Let us then be perſuaded by all that hath been ſaid upon this argument, to a firm belief of the chriſtian doctrine. I hope you are in ſome meaſure ſatisfied, that the objections againſt it are not ſuch, as ought much to move a wiſe and conſiderate man. If we believe that GOD hath taken ſo much care of mankind, as to make any certain revelation of his will to them, and of the way to eternal happineſs; let us next conſider, whether any religion in the world can come in competition with the chriſtian, and with half that reaſon pretend to be from GOD, that chriſtianity is able to produce for it ſelf, whether we conſider the things to be believed or the duties to be practiſed, or the motives or arguments to the practice of thoſe duties, or the divine confirmation that is given to the whole. And if we be thus perſuaded concerning it, let us reſolve to live up to the laws and rules of this holy religion. Our belief of it ſignifies nothing without the fruits and effects of a good life. And if this were once reſolved upon, the difficulty of believing would ceaſe; for the true reaſon why men are unwilling to believe the truths of the goſpel, is becauſe they are loth to put them in practice. "Every one that doth evil, "hateth the light." The true ground of mens prejudice againſt the chriſtian doctrine, is becauſe they have no mind to obey it; and when all is done, the great objection that lies at the bottom of mens minds againſt it, is, that it is an enemy to their luſts, and they cannot profeſs to believe it without condemning themſelves, for not complying with it in their lives and practice.

SERMON

SERMON CXX.

JESUS the SON of GOD, prov'd by his resurrection.

ROM. i. 4.

And declared to be the SON *of* GOD, *with power, according to the* SPIRIT *of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*

ST. Paul in the beginning of this epistle (according to his custom in the rest) stiles himself an apostle, particularly call'd, and set apart by GOD, for the preaching of the gospel; the main subject whereof was, "JESUS CHRIST our "LORD;" who as he was, according to his divine nature, "the eternal SON of GOD;" so according to his humane nature, he was not only "the son of "man," but also "the SON of GOD." "According "to the flesh" (that is, the weakness, and frailty, and mortality of this humane nature) "he was "the son of David," that is, of his posterity by his mother, who was of that house and line. "Made of the seed of David, according to the "flesh," ver. 3. "But according to the SPIRIT of "holiness;" (that is, in regard of that divine power of the HOLY GHOST, which was manifested in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead) "he "was demonstrated to be the SON of GOD;" even according to his humane nature; "declared to be "the SON of GOD, with power, according to the "SPIRIT of holiness, by the resurrection from the "dead." SERM. CXX.

SERM. CXX

All the difficulty in the words is concerning the meaning of this phraſe of CHRIST's being "declared "to be the SON of GOD:" the word is ὁρισθέντος, which moſt frequently in ſcripture does ſignify, "predeſtinated, decreed, determined;" but likewiſe ſignifies, that which is "defined, declared, "demonſtrated, put out of all doubt and contro- "verſy." And in this ſenſe our tranſlation renders it, as if the apoſtle had ſaid, that our LORD JESUS CHRIST, though according to the frailty and weakneſs of his humane nature, he was of the ſeed of David; yet in reſpect of that divine power of the HOLY GHOST, which manifeſted itſelf in him, eſpecially in his reſurrection from the dead, he was "declared to be the SON of GOD, with "power," that is, mightily, powerfully demonſtrated to be ſo; ſo as to put the matter out of diſpute and controverſy.

And therefore following our own tranſlation, I ſhall handle the words in this ſenſe, as containing this propoſition in them: "that the reſurrection of our "LORD JESUS CHRIST from the dead, by the Ho- "LY GHOST, is a powerful demonſtration that he "was the SON of GOD."

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this propoſition to conſider theſe two things.

Firſt, upon what account CHRIST, as man, is ſaid to be "the SON of GOD."

Secondly, in what ſenſe he is ſaid to be "de- "clared to be the SON of GOD, by his reſurrection "from the dead." The conſideration of theſe two particulars will fully clear this propoſition, and the apoſtle's meaning in it.

First,

SERM. CXX.

First, upon what account CHRIST, as a man, is said to be "the SON of GOD." And for our right apprehension of this matter, it is very well worthy our observation, that CHRIST, as man, is no where in scripture said to be "the SON of GOD," but with relation to the divine power of the HOLY GHOST, some way or other eminently manifested in him; I say the divine power of the HOLY GHOST, as the lord and giver of life, as he is called in the ancient creeds of the christian church. For as men are naturally said to be the children of those from whom they receive their life and being; so CHRIST, as man, is said to be "the SON of GOD," because he had life communicated to him, from the FATHER, by an immediate power of the SPIRIT of GOD, or the HOLY GHOST. First at his conception, which was by the HOLY GHOST. The conception of our blessed SAVIOUR was an immediate act of the power of the HOLY GHOST, overshadowing, as the scripture expresseth it, the blessed mother of our LORD: and then at his resurrection, when after his death, he was, by the operation of the HOLY GHOST, raised to life again.

Now upon these two accounts only, CHRIST as man is said in scripture to be "the SON of GOD." He was really so upon account of his conception; but this was secret and invisible: but most eminently and remarkably so, upon account of his resurrection, which was open and visible to all.

1. Upon account of his conception by the power of the HOLY GHOST. That upon this account he was called "the SON of GOD," St. Luke most expressly tells us, Luke i. 35. where the angel tells the virgin Mary, that "the HOLY GHOST should come upon her, and the

SERM. CXX.

" power of the highest should overshadow her, and " therefore that holy thing, which should be born " of her, should be called the SON of GOD." And this our SAVIOUR means by " the FATHER's sancti- " fying him, and sending him into the world;" for which reason he says he might justly call himself the SON of GOD, John x. 35, 36. " If he call them " gods, unto whom the word of GOD came, and " the scripture cannot be broken: say ye of him, " whom the FATHER hath sanctified, and sent into " the world, thou blasphemest, because I said I am " the SON of GOD?" if there had been no other reason, this had been sufficient to have given him the title of the SON of GOD, that he was brought into the world by the sanctification, or divine power of the HOLY GHOST.

2. CHRIST is also said in scripture to be the SON of GOD, and to be declared to be so upon account of " his resurrection from the dead," by the power of the HOLY GHOST. His resurrection from the dead, is here in the text ascribed to " the SPIRIT " of holiness, or the HOLY GHOST." And so in other places of scripture, Rom. viii. 11. " If " the SPIRIT of him that raised up JESUS from " the dead, dwell in you:" and, 1 Pet. iii. 18. " Being put to death in the flesh: but quickned in " the SPIRIT;" that is, he suffered in that frail mortal nature which he assumed; but was raised again by the power of the HOLY GHOST, of the SPIRIT of GOD which resided in him. And upon this account he is expressly said in scripture to be the SON of GOD. Psal. ii. 7. " I will declare the decree; " the LORD hath said unto me, thou art my SON, " this day have I begotten thee;" to which perhaps

haps the apostle alludes here in the text, when he says that "CHRIST was decreed to be the SON of "GOD by his resurrection from the dead." To be sure these words, "this day have I begotten thee," St. Paul expressly tells us were accomplish'd in the resurrection of CHRIST; as if GOD by raising him from the dead, had begotten him, and decreed him to be his SON." Acts xii. 32, 33. "And we de- "clare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise "which was made unto the fathers, GOD hath ful- "filled the same unto their children, in that he hath "raised up JESUS again, as it is also written in the "second psalm, thou art my SON, this day have I "begotten thee." SERM. CXX.

He was the SON of GOD before, as he was conceived by the HOLY GHOST; but this was secret and invisible, and known only to the mother of our LORD: and therefore GOD thought fit to give a publick and visible demonstration of it, so as to put the matter out of all question, he declared him in a powerful manner to be his SON, by giving him a new life after death, by raising him from the dead; and by this new and eminent testimony given to him, declared him again to be his SON, and confirmed the title which was given him before upon a true, but more secret account, of his being conceived by the HOLY GHOST.

And as our SAVIOUR is said to be the SON of GOD upon this twofold account, of his conception by the HOLY GHOST, and his resurrection to life by the SPIRIT of GOD: so the scripture (which does solicitously pursue a resemblance and conformity between CHRIST and christians) does likewise upon a twofold account (answerable to our SAVIOUR's birth

SERM. CXX.

birth and resurrection) call true believers and christians, "the children of GOD;" viz. upon account of their regeneration or new birth, by the operation of the SPIRIT of GOD; and upon account of their resurrection to eternal life, by the power of the same SPIRIT.

Upon account of our regeneration and becoming christians by the power and operation of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD upon our minds, we are said to be the children of GOD, as being regenerated and born again by the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD. And this is our first adoption. And for this reason the SPIRIT of GOD conferred upon christians at their baptism, and dwelling and residing in them afterwards, is called "the SPIRIT of adoption;" Rom. viii. 15 "Ye have received the SPIRIT of adop-"tion, whereby you cry abba FATHER;" and Gal. iv. 5, 6. believers are said to "receive the adop-"tion of sons; GOD having sent forth the SPI-"RIT of his SON into their hearts, crying abba "FATHER;" that is, all christians, for as much as they are regenerated by the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, and having the SPIRIT of GOD dwelling in them, may with confidence call GOD FATHER, and look upon themselves as his children. So the apostle tells us, Rom. viii. 14. "That as many as are led "(or acted) by the SPIRIT of GOD, are the sons "GOD."

But though we are said to be the children of GOD upon account of our regeneration, and the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD dwelling and residing in christians; yet we are eminently so, upon account of our resurrection to eternal life, by the mighty power of GOD's SPIRIT. This is our final adoption and the consummation

mation of it; and therefore Rom. viii. 21. this is called "the glorious liberty of the sons of GOD," because by this we are for ever "delivered from the "bondage of corruption;" and by way of eminency, "the adoption, viz. the redemption of our "bodies."

We are indeed "the sons of GOD" before, upon account of the regenerating and sanctifying virtue of the HOLY GHOST; but finally and chiefly upon account of our resurrection by the power of the divine SPIRIT. So St. John tells us, that then we shall be declared to be "the sons of GOD," after another manner than we are now: 1 John iii. 1. "Behold what manner of love the FATHER hath "bestowed upon us, that we should be called the "sons of GOD." "Now we are the sons of GOD," (that is, our adoption is begun in our regeneration and sanctification) "but it doth not yet appear what "we shall be;" we shall be much more eminently so at the resurrection. "We know, that when he "shall appear, we shall be like him."

But the most express and remarkable text to this purpose, is, Luke xx. 36. where good men, after the resurrection, are for this reason said to be "the "children of GOD," because they are "the chil-"dren of the resurrection." "But they who shall "be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and "the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor "are given in marriage, neither can they die any "more; for they are equal to the angels, and are "the children of GOD, being the children of the "resurrection." For this reason they are said to be "the children of GOD," because they are raised by him to a new life; and to be made partakers of

that

SERM. CXX.

that which is promiſed to them, and reſerved for them. For that all are raiſed by the power of GOD, out of the duſt of the earth, are not therefore "the children of GOD;" but only they that have part in the bleſſed reſurrection to eternal life, and "do inherit the kingdom prepared for them." Not thoſe who are raiſed to a perpetual death, and the "reſurrection of condemnation." Theſe are not "the children of GOD;" but "the children "of wrath," and "the children of perdition."

But the reſurrection of the juſt, is the full and final declaration, that we are "the children of GOD;" not only becauſe we are reſtored to a new life, but becauſe at the reſurrection, we are admitted to the full poſſeſſion of that bleſſed inheritance which is purchaſed for us, and promiſed to us.

And the SPIRIT of GOD which is conferred upon believers in their regeneration, and afterwards dwells and reſides in them, is the pledge and earneſt of our final adoption, by our reſurrection to eternal life; and upon this account, and no other, is ſaid to be the earneſt of our future inheritance, and the ſeal and confirmation of it. Eph. i. 13. "In whom "alſo, after that ye believed, ye were ſealed by the "HOLY SPIRIT of promiſe, which is the earneſt "of our inheritance, until the redemption of the "purchaſed poſſeſſion;" that is, the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD which chriſtians were made partakers of, upon their ſincere belief of the chriſtian religion, is the ſeal and earneſt of our reſurrection to eternal life; as the apoſtle plainly tells us, in that remarkable text; Rom. viii. 11. "If the SPIRIT of "him that raiſed up JESUS from the dead dwell in "you, he that raiſed up CHRIST from the dead,

"ſhall

" ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies, by his " SPIRIT that dwelleth in you." SERM. CXX.

I have been the longer upon this, becauſe it ſerves fully to explain to us thoſe obſcure phraſes, of " the " ſeal and earneſt, and firſt-fruits of the SPIRIT," which many have miſtaken to import ſome particular and ſpiritual revelation or impreſſion upon the minds of good men, aſſuring them of their ſalvation. Whereas the apoſtle intended no more by them, but that the SPIRIT of GOD which dwells in believers, enabling them " to mortify the deeds " of the fleſh, and to bring forth the fruits of the " SPIRIT," is a pledge and earneſt to us, of a bleſſed reſurrection to eternal life by the power of the SPIRIT of GOD which now dwells in us, and is the ſame SPIRIT which raiſed up JESUS from the dead. And in this chapter, the SPIRIT of GOD is ſaid, ver. 16. " to bear witneſs to our ſpirits," that is, to aſſure our minds, " that we are the children of " GOD;" that is, that we are his children now, and conſequently heirs of a glorious reſurrection to eternal life: for ſo it follows in the next words, " and " if children, then heirs, heirs of GOD, and joint " heirs with CHRIST; if ſo be that we ſuffer with " him, that we may alſo be glorified together." And this being glorified together with CHRIST at the reſurrection, he calls, ver. 19. " the manifeſta- " tion of the ſons of GOD." Thus you ſee how in conformity to the SON of GOD, our elder brother, we are ſaid to be the ſons of GOD, becauſe we are now regenerated, and ſhall at the laſt day be raiſed up to eternal life, by the power of the SPIRIT of GOD. I proceed to the

SERM. CXX.

Second thing I propounded to ſpeak to, for the clearing of theſe words, namely, in what ſenſe CHRIST is ſaid to be "declared, or demonſtrated to "be the SON of GOD by his reſurrection from the "dead." By which the apoſtle means theſe two things.

1. That by his reſurrection from the dead he was approved by GOD to be the true MESSIAS, and vindicated to the world from all ſuſpicion of being a deceiver and impoſtor. And conſequently in the

2. Place, that hereby GOD gave teſtimony to the truth and divinity of his doctrine.

1. By his reſurrection from the dead, he was approved by GOD to be the true MESSIAS, foretold by the prophets, and expected at that time by the Jews, and ſufficiently vindicated to the world to be no deceiver and impoſtor.

And for our fuller underſtanding of this, we are to conſider theſe two things.

(1.) What the apprehenſions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the MESSIAS. And

(2.) What the many crimes were which they laid to our SAVIOUR's charge, and for which they condemned him.

(1.) What the apprehenſions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the MESSIAS. And it is very plain from the evangelical hiſtory, that they generally apprehended theſe two things of him: that the MESSIAS was to be "the SON of GOD, and the "king of Iſrael;" and therefore that our SAVIOUR by affirming himſelf to be the MESSIAS, did call himſelf "the SON of GOD, and the king of Iſrael." John i. 41. Andrew tells his brother Simon, "we "have found the MESSIAS." ver. 45. Philip tells Natha-

Nathanael, " we have found him, of whom Moſes " in the law, and the prophets did write;" that is, the MESSIAS. ver. 49. Nathanael upon diſcourſe with our SAVIOUR, being convinced that he was the MESSIAS, owns him in theſe terms; " Rabbi, " thou art the SON of GOD, thou art the king of " Iſrael." John vi. 69. Peter declares his belief that he was the CHRIST, or the MESSIAS, in theſe words, " we believe and are ſure that thou art the " SON of the living GOD." This appears likewiſe from the high-prieſt's queſtion to him, Matth. xxvi. 63. " Art thou the CHRIST, (that is, the MESSIAS) " the SON of the living GOD;" or as is it in St. Mark, " the SON of the bleſſed;" compared with Pilate's queſtion, " art thou the king of the Jews?" and when he was upon the croſs, ſome reviled him under the notion of the SON of GOD, Matth. xxvii. 40. " If thou be the SON of GOD, come down from " the croſs:" others under the notion of " the " king of Iſrael," ver. 42. " If he be the king of " Iſrael, let him come down from the croſs." From all which it is plain that the Jews expected and believed, that the true MESSIAS was to be the SON of GOD, and the king of Iſrael; and whoever was not ſo, was a deceiver and impoſtor. But our SAVIOUR affirmed himſelf to be the true MESSIAS, and the SON of GOD. Now GOD by raiſing him from the dead, did abundantly vindicate him to the world, from all ſuſpicion of impoſture; and gave teſtimony to him, that he was all that he ſaid of himſelf, viz. " the true MESSIAS, and the SON of " GOD." SERM. CXX.

Which will further appear, if we conſider, (2dly,) what were the crimes which the Jews laid to our

SERM. CXX.

SAVIOUR's charge, and for which they condemned him; and they were mainly these two, that by giving himself to be the MESSIAS, he made himself "king of Israel, and the SON of GOD." Of the first of these they accused him to Pilate, hoping by this accusation to make him guilty of sedition against the Roman government; for saying, that he was "the king of Israel." Of the other they accused him to the chief priests, as being guilty of blasphemy, in that not being the MESSIAS, he call'd himself "the SON of GOD." And upon this they laid the main stress, as being a thing that would condemn him by their law. They charged him with this in his life-time, as appears by those words of our SAVIOUR, John x. 36. "Say ye of "him whom the FATHER hath sanctified, and sent "into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said "I am the SON of GOD?" And when he was arraigned before the chief priests, they accused him of this, and he owning this charge, "that he call'd "himself the SON of GOD," upon this they judged him guilty of death. Matth. xxvi. 65, 66. "Then "the high priest rent his clothes, and said, he hath "spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of "witness? behold, now ye have heard his blasphe-"my. What think ye? they answered, he is guilty "of death." And when Pilate told them, that he found no fault in him, they still instance in this as his crime, John xix. 7. "We have a law, and by "our law he ought to die, because he made himself "the SON of GOD."

Now this being the crime which was charged upon him, and for which he was crucified, and put to death; GOD, by raising him from the dead, and taking

taking him up into heaven, gave teſtimony to him, that he was no impoſtor, and that he did not vainly arrogate to himſelf to be the MESSIAS, and the SON of GOD. GOD by raiſing him from the dead, by the power of the HOLY GHOST, gave a mighty demonſtration to him, that he was the SON of GOD. For which reaſon he is ſaid by the apoſtle, 1 Tim. iii. 16. to be "juſtified by the SPIRIT." The SPIRIT gave teſtimony to him at his baptiſm, and by the mighty works that appeared in him in his life-time; but he was moſt eminently and remarkably "juſtified by the HOLY GHOST, by his reſurrection "from the dead;" GOD hereby bearing him witneſs, that he was unjuſtly condemned, and that he aſſumed nothing to himſelf, but what of right did belong to him, when he ſaid he was the MESSIAS, and the SON of GOD. For how could a man that was condemned to die for calling himſelf the SON of GOD, be more remarkably vindicated, and more clearly proved to be ſo, than by being raiſed from the dead, by the power of GOD?

SERM CXX.

And, 2dly, GOD did conſequently hereby give teſtimony to the truth and divinity of our SAVIOUR's doctrine. Being proved by his reſurrection to be the SON of GOD, this proved him to be a teacher ſent by him, and what he declared to the world was the mind and will of GOD. For this none was more likely to know, and to report truly to mankind, than the SON of GOD, who came from "the "boſom of his FATHER." And becauſe the reſurrection of CHRIST is ſo great a teſtimony to the truth of his doctrine, hence it is that St. Paul tells us, that the belief of this one article of CHRIST's reſurrection, is ſufficient to a man's ſalvation,

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SERM. CXX.

Rom. x. 9. "If thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth "the LORD JESUS, and ſhalt believe in thy heart, "that GOD hath raiſed him from the dead, thou "ſhalt be ſaved." The reaſon is plain, becauſe the reſurrection of CHRIST confirmed the truth and divinity of his doctrine; ſo that the belief of our SAVIOUR's reſurrection does by neceſſary conſequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine. That GOD raiſed him from the dead, after he was condemned and put to death for calling himſelf the SON of GOD, is a demonſtration that he really was the SON of GOD; and if he was the SON of GOD, the doctrine which he taught was true, and from GOD.

And thus I have ſhewn you, how the reſurrection of CHRIST from the dead, is a powerful demonſtration that he was the SON of GOD.

All that remains, is briefly to draw ſome practical inferences from the conſideration of our SAVIOUR's reſurrection.

1ſt. To confirm and eſtabliſh our minds in the belief of the chriſtian religion, of which the reſurrection of CHRIST from the dead is ſo great a confirmation. And therefore I told you that this one article is mention'd by St. Paul as the ſum and abridgment of the chriſtian faith; "if thou ſhalt confeſs "with thy mouth the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and "believe in thy heart that GOD hath raiſed him "from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved." The belief of our SAVIOUR's reſurrection doth by neceſſary conſequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine; for he who believes that GOD raiſed him from the dead, after he was put to death for calling himſelf the SON of GOD, cannot but believe him to be the

the SON of GOD; and consequently that the doctrine which he delivered was from GOD. SERM. CXX.

2dly, The resurrection of CHRIST from the dead assures us of a future judgment, and of the recompences and rewards of another world. That CHRIST was raised from the dead, is a demonstration of another life after this; and no man that believes the immortality of our souls, and another life after this, ever doubted of a future judgment; so that by the resurrection of CHRIST from the dead, GOD hath given assurance unto all men of a future judgment, and consequently of the recompences and rewards of another world.

The consideration whereof ought to have a mighty influence upon us, more especially to these three purposes.

1st. To raise our minds above the present enjoyments of this life. Were but men convinced of this great and obvious truth, that there is an infinite difference between time and eternity, between a few days and everlasting ages; would we but sometimes represent to ourselves, what thoughts and apprehensions dying men have of this world, how vain and empty a thing it appears to them; how like a pageant and shadow it looks, as it passeth away from them; methinks none of these things could be a sufficient temptation to any man to forget GOD and his soul; but notwithstanding all the present delights and allurements of sense, we should be strongly intent upon the concernments of another world, and almost wholly taken up with the thoughts of the vast eternity which we are ready to enter into. For what is there in this world, this vast and howling wilderness, this rude and barbarous country which

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SERM. CXX.

we are but to pass through, which should detain and entangle our affections, and take off our thoughts from our everlasting habitation, from that better, and that heavenly country where we hope to live and to be happy for ever?

2dly, The consideration of the rewards of another world should comfort and support us under the troubles and afflictions of this world. The hopes of a blessed resurrection are a very proper consideration to bear us up under the evils and pressures of this life. If we hope for so great a happiness hereafter, we may be contented to bear some afflictions in this world; because the blessedness which we expect will so abundantly recompense and outweigh our present sufferings. So that the apostle assures us, Rom. viii. 18. "We know that the sufferings of this "present time are not worthy to be compared with "the glory that shall be revealed in us." The consideration whereof was that which made the primitive christians to triumph in their sufferings, and in the midst of all their tribulations "to rejoice in the "hopes of the glory of GOD;" because their sufferings did really prepare and make way for their glory. So the same apostle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. "Our light afflictions which are but for a "moment, work for us a far more exceeding and "eternal weight of glory; whilst we look not at "the things which are seen; for the things which "are seen are temporal, but the things which are not "seen are eternal."

3dly, and lastly, the assurance of our future reward is a mighty encouragement to obedience and a holy life. What greater encouragement can we have than this, that all the good which we do in this world

world will accompany us into the other? "that when "we reſt from our labours, our works will follow "us?" that when we ſhall be ſtript of other things, and parted from them, theſe will ſtill remain with us, and bear us company? our riches and honours, our ſenſual pleaſures and enjoyments will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay many times they do not accompany us ſo far as the grave, but take occaſion to forſake us, when we have the greateſt need and uſe of them: but piety and virtue are "that better part which cannot be taken from "us." All the good actions which we do in this world will go along with us into the other, and through the merits of our REDEEMER procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful GOD, a glorious and eternal reward; not according to the meanneſs of our ſervices, but according to the bounty of his mind, and the vaſtneſs of his treaſures and eſtate. SERM. CXX.

Now what an encouragement is this to holineſs and obedience, to conſider that it will all be our own another day; to be aſſured that whoever ſerves GOD faithfully, and does ſuffer for him patiently, does lay up ſo much treaſure for himſelf in another world, and provides laſting comforts for himſelf, and faithful and conſtant companions, that will never leave him nor forſake him?

Let us then do all the good we can, while we have opportunity, and ſerve GOD with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do ſhall be loſt and fall to the ground, that every grace and virtue that we exerciſe in this life, and every degree of them, "ſhall receive their full recompence at the reſurrec-"tion of the juſt."

5.

How ſhould this inſpire us with reſolution and zeal and induſtry in the ſervice of GOD, to have ſuch a reward continually in our eye? how ſhould it tempt us to our duty, to have a crown and a kingdom offered to us, "joys unſpeakable and full of "glory, ſuch things as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear "heard, nor have entred into the heart of man?" And ſuch are the things which GOD hath laid up for them who love him heartily, and ſerve him faithfully in this world.

SERMON CXXI.

The danger of apoſtaſy from chriſtianity.

HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6

For it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, *and have taſted the good word of* GOD, *and the powers of the world to come; if they ſhall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the* SON *of* GOD *afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame.*

SERM. CXXI.

THESE words are full of difficulties, and the miſunderſtanding of them hath not only been an occaſion of a great deal of trouble, and even deſpair to particular perſons, but one of the chief reaſons why the church of Rome did for a long time reject the authority of this book; which by the way

way I cannot but take notice of as a demonſtrative inſtance both of the fallible judgment of that church, and of the fallibility of oral tradition; for St. Jerom more than once expreſly tells us, "that in his time "(which was about 400 years after CHRIST) the "church of Rome did not receive this epiſtle for ca-"nonical:" but it is plain, that ſince that time, whether moved by the evidence of the thing, or (which is more probable) by the conſent and authority of other churches, they have received it, and do at this day acknowledge it for canonical; from whence one of theſe two things will neceſſarily follow; either that they were in an error for 400 years together while they rejected it; or that they have ſince erred for a long time in receiving it. One of theſe is unavoidable; for if the book be canonical now, it was ſo from the beginning; for Bellarmine himſelf confeſſeth (and if he had not confeſſed it, it is nevertheleſs true and certain) that the church cannot make a book canonical, which was not ſo before; if it was not canonical at firſt, it cannot be made ſo afterward; ſo that let them chooſe which part they will, it is evident, beyond all denial, that the church of Rome hath actually erred in her judgment concerning the authority of this book; and one error of this kind is enough to deſtroy her infallibility, there being no greater evidence that a church is not infallible, than if it plainly appear that ſhe hath been deceived. SERM. CXXI.

And this alſo is a convincing inſtance of the fallibility of oral tradition. For if that be infallible in delivering down to us the canonical books of ſcripture, it neceſſarily follows, that whatever books were delivered down to us for canonical in one age, muſt

SERM. CXXI.

have been ſo in all ages; and whatever was rejected in any age, muſt always have been rejected: but we plainly ſee the contrary, from the inſtance of this epiſtle, concerning which the church of Rome (which pretends to be the great and faithful preſerver of tradition) hath in ſeveral ages deliver'd ſeveral things. This is a peremptory inſtance both of the fallibility of the Roman church, and of her oral tradition.

Having obſerved this by the way, which I could not well paſs by upon ſo fair an occaſion, I ſhall betake myſelf to the explication of theſe words; towards which it will be no ſmall advantage to conſider the particular phraſes and expreſſions in the text. "It is impoſſible for thoſe who were once "enlightned;" that is, were ſolemnly admitted into the church by baptiſm, and embraced the profeſſion of chriſtianity. Nothing was more frequent among the ancients, than to call baptiſm "φωτισμὸν, illumi-"nation;" and thoſe who were baptized were called, "φωτιζόμενοι, enlightned perſons," becauſe of that divine illumination which was conveyed to the minds of men by the knowledge of chriſtianity, the doctrine whereof they made profeſſion of at their baptiſm. And therefore Juſtin Martyr tells us, "that by cal-"ling upon GOD the FATHER, and the name of "our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the name of the "HOLY GHOST, ὁ φωτιζόμενος λούεται, the enlight-"ned perſon is waſhed;" and again more expreſly, "Καλεῖται ὃ τοῦτο λουτρὸν φωτισμὸς, this laver (ſpeak-"ing of baptiſm) is called illumination." And St. Cyprian gives us the reaſon; becauſe by virtue of baptiſm *in expiatum pectus ac purum deſuper ſe lumen infundit*, "light is infuſed from above into the puri-

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" fied ſoul." And that this expreſſion is ſo to be underſtood here in the text, as alſo chap. x. 32. the Syriac and Ethiopic give us good ground to believe; for they render the text thus, " it is impoſ- " ſible for thoſe who have been once baptized, and " have taſted of the heavenly gift." And at the xth chap. ver. 32. which we tranſlate, but call to " remembrance the former days, in which after ye " were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of " afflictions;" that is, call to mind the former days, in which after by baptiſm ye had publickly embraced the profeſſion of chriſtianity, ye were upon that account expoſed to many grievous ſufferings and perſecutions. So that I think there can be no great doubt, but, by " thoſe that were once enlightned," the apoſtle means thoſe that were baptized.

To proceed then, " for it is impoſſible for thoſe " who were once enlightned, and have taſted of the " heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the " HOLY GHOST;" theſe two expreſſions ſeem to denote the ſpiritual benefits and graces of the HOLY GHOST conferred upon chriſtians by baptiſm; particularly regeneration, which is the proper work of the HOLY GHOST, and juſtification and remiſſion of ſins. So we find faith, whereby we are juſtified, called the gift of GOD, Eph. ii. 8. " Faith is the gift " of GOD;" and our juſtification is called a gift, and a free gift, five ſeveral times in one chapter, Rom. v. 15, 16, 17, 18. " But not as the offence, ſo alſo is " the free gift; for if through the offence of one " many be dead, much more the grace of GOD, " and the gift by grace, which is by one man " JESUS CHRIST, hath abounded unto many;" and what this free gift is, he tells us in the next words,

viz.

SERM. CXXI.

viz. justification, or remission of sins, ver. 16. "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the "gift; for the judgment was by one to condemna- "tion; but the free gift is of many offences unto "justification. For if by one man's offence, death "reigned by one, much more they which receive "abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteous- "ness, shall reign in life by one JESUS CHRIST. "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment "came upon all men to condemnation: even so by "the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon "all men unto justification of life." So that by "the heavenly gift," I understand remission of sins, and by being "made partakers of the HOLY "GHOST" the sanctifying power and efficacy of GOD'S SPIRIT.

"And have tasted the good word of GOD;" that is, entertained the gospel, which is here called "the good word of GOD;" by reason of the gracious promises contained in it, particularly the promises of eternal life and happiness.

"And the powers of the world to come," δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντ@ αἰῶν@, the powers of the gospel age; that is, the miraculous powers of the HOLY GHOST which were bestowed upon men, in order to the propagation of the gospel. And that this is the true meaning of this phrase, will I think be very plain to any one who shall but consider, that the word δυνάμεις is generally in scripture used for miraculous powers and operations; and particularly to express the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, which were bestowed upon the apostles and first christians; (I need not cite the particular texts for the proof of this, they are so many

and

and ſo well known;) and then if we conſider farther, that the times of the goſpel, the days of the MESSIAS, are frequently called by the Jews *ſeculum futurum*, "the age to come." And indeed this is the very phraſe uſed by the LXXII concerning our SAVIOUR, Iſa. ix. 6. where he is called according to our tranſlation, "the everlaſting FATHER," but according to that of the LXXII πατὴρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, "the FATHER of the future age." And this very phraſe is uſed once more in this epiſtle to the Heb. chap. ii. 5. "For unto the angels hath he "not put in ſubjection the world to come, whereof "we now ſpeak." He had ſaid before, "that the "law was given by angels," ver. 2. "If the word "ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt;" but the diſpenſation of the goſpel, which he calls "the world to "come," or the future age, was not committed to them, this was adminiſtred by the SON of GOD; "unto the angels hath he not put into ſubjection "the world to come." And 'tis obſervable, that this phraſe is only uſed in this epiſtle to the Hebrews, becauſe the Jews very well underſtood the meaning of it, being that whereby they commonly expreſt the times of the goſpel according to that ancient tradition of the houſe of Elias, which diſtributed the duration of the world into three αἰῶνες, or ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the MESSIAS, which they called the *ſeculum futurum*, or "the age to come;" and which is likewiſe in ſcripture called, "the laſt "days, or times, and the concluſion of the ages." Concerning which, it was particularly propheſied, that the HOLY GHOST ſhould be poured forth upon men in miraculous gifts and powers. And to this very

SERM. CXXI.

SERM. CXXI.

very purpoſe the prophet Joel is cited by St. Peter, Acts ii. 16, 17. "That is that which was ſpoken by "the prophet Joel, and it ſhall come to paſs in the "laſt days (ſaith GOD) I will pour out of my SPI-"RIT upon all fleſh; and your ſons and your "daughters ſhall propheſy, &c." From all which it is very evident, that by "taſting of the powers of "the world to come," is meant being partakers of the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, which were poured forth in the goſpel age, by the Jews commonly called "the world to come."

"If they ſhall fall away;" that is, if after all this they ſhall apoſtatize from this profeſſion, out of love to this preſent world, or from the fear of perſecutions and ſufferings.

"It is impoſſible to renew them again to repen-"tance;" that is, it is a thing very difficult, hardly to be hoped for, that ſuch wilful and notorious apoſtates ſhould be reſtored again by repentance. For the word ἀδύνατον, which we tranſlate "impoſſi-"ble," is not always to be taken in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, for that which abſolutely cannot be; but many times for that which is ſo very difficult that it ſeems next to an impoſſibility. So our SAVIOUR, that which in one place he calls "exceeding hard, viz. for a rich "man to enter into the kingdom of heaven", he afterwards calls "impoſſible with men;" and ſo here I underſtand the apoſtle, that thoſe who apo-ſtatize from chriſtianity, after baptiſm and the bene-fits of it, "'tis exceeding hard to recover them "again to repentance:" this phraſe "πάλιν ἀνα-"καινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, to renew them again to re-"pentance," ſome underſtand of reſtoring them again to the peace and communion of the church, by

by a courſe of penance, ſuch as was preſcribed in the ancient church to great offenders; and then they underſtand by ἀδύνατον, not a natural, but a moral impoſſibility; that which cannot be done according to the orders and conſtitutions of the church; that is, the church did refuſe to admit apoſtates, and ſome other great offenders, as murderers and adulterers, to a courſe of penance, in order to their reconciliation with the church; this Tertullian tells us was the ſtrictneſs of the church in his time, *neque idololatriæ, neque ſanguini pax ab eccleſia redditur*; "they "admitted neither idolaters, nor murderers to the "reconciliation of the church." Though they were never ſo penitent, and ſhed never ſo many tears, yet he ſays they were *jejunæ pacis lachrymæ*, their tears were in vain, to reconcile them to the peace and communion of the church. He ſays indeed they did not abſolutely pronounce their caſe deſperate in reſpect of GOD's pardon and forgiveneſs; *ſed de veniâ Deo reſervamus*, "for that they referr'd them to GOD:" but they were never to be admitted again into the church; ſo ſtrict were many churches, and that upon the authority of this text; though the church of Rome was more moderate in this matter, and for that reaſon call'd the authority of this book into queſtion.

SERM. CXXI.

But I ſee no reaſon why theſe words ſhould primarily be underſtood of reſtoring men to the communion of the church by penance: but they ſeem to be meant of reſtoring men to the favour of GOD by repentance; of which indeed their being reſtor'd to the communion of the church was a good ſign. This the apoſtle ſays was very difficult, for thoſe who after baptiſm, and the ſeveral benefits of it,

5.

SERM. CXXI.

did apoſtatize from chriſtianity, " to be recover'd " again to repentance."

" Seeing they crucify to themſelves the SON of " GOD afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame." This is ſpoken by way of aggravation of the crime of apoſtaſy, that they who fall off from chriſtianity, in effect and by interpretation do crucify " the SON of " GOD" over again, and expoſe him to ſhame and reproach, as the Jews did; for by denying and renouncing of him, they declare him to be an impoſtor, and conſequently worthy of that death which he ſuffered, and that ignominy which he was expoſed to; and therefore, in account of GOD, they are ſaid to do that, which by their actions they do approve; ſo that it is made a crime of the higheſt nature, as if they ſhould " crucify the SON of GOD," and uſe him in the moſt ignominious manner, even " tread under foot the SON of GOD," as the expreſſion is to the ſame purpoſe, chap. x. 29.

Thus I have endeavour'd, as briefly and clearly as I could, to explain to you the true meaning and importance of the ſeveral phraſes and expreſſions in the text; the ſenſe whereof amounts to this, that if thoſe who are baptized, and by baptiſm have received remiſſion of ſins, and do believe the doctrine of the goſpel, and the promiſes of it, and are endow'd with the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, if ſuch perſons as theſe ſhall after all this apoſtatize from chriſtianity, it is very hard, and next to an impoſſibility, to imagine how ſuch perſons ſhould recover again by repentance, ſeeing they are guilty of as great a crime, as if in their own perſons they had put to death and ignominiouſly uſed the SON of GOD, becauſe by rejecting of him,

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they declared to the world that he ſuffered deſervedly. SERM. CXXI.

Having thus explained the words, in order to the further vindication of them from the miſtakes and miſapprehenſions which have been about them, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe five things.

1ſt, That the ſin here mention'd is not "the ſin "againſt the HOLY GHOST."

2dly, That the apoſtle does not declare it to be abſolutely impoſſible, but only that thoſe who are guilty of it are recover'd to repentance with great difficulty.

3dly, That it is not a partial apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion by any particular vicious practice.

4thly, That it is a total apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion, and more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry, which the apoſtle here ſpeaks of.

5thly, The reaſon of the difficulty of the recovery of thoſe who fall into this ſin.

1ſt, That the ſin here mention'd is not "the ſin "againſt the HOLY GHOST," which I have heretofore diſcourſed of, and ſhewn wherein the particular nature of it does conſiſt. There are three things which do remarkably diſtinguiſh the ſin here ſpoken of in the text, from "the ſin againſt the HOLY "GHOST" deſcribed by our SAVIOUR.

1ſt, The perſons that are guilty of this ſin here in the text, are evidently ſuch as had embraced chriſtianity, and had taken upon them the profeſſion of it: whereas thoſe whom our SAVIOUR chargeth with "the ſin againſt the HOLY GHOST," are ſuch as conſtantly oppoſed his doctrine, and reſiſted the evidence he offer'd for it.

SERM. CXXI.

2dly, The particular nature of "the ſin again the "HOLY GHOST" conſiſted in blaſpheming the SPIRIT, whereby our SAVIOUR wrought his miracles, and ſaying he did not thoſe things by the SPIRIT of GOD, but by the aſſiſtance of the devil, in that malicious and unreaſonable imputing of the plain effects of the HOLY GHOST to the power of the devil, and conſequently in an obſtinate refuſal to be convinced by the miracles that he wrought: but here is nothing of all this ſo much as intimated by the apoſtle in this place.

3ly, "The ſin againſt the HOLY GHOST" is declared to be abſolutely "unpardonable, both in this "world, and in that which is to come." But this is not declared to be abſolutely unpardonable; which brings me to the

2d thing, namely, that this ſin here ſpoken of by the apoſtle, is not ſaid to be abſolutely unpardonable. It is not "the ſin againſt the HOLY GHOST;" and whatever elſe it be, it is not out of the compaſs of GOD's pardon and forgiveneſs. So our SAVIOUR hath told us, "that all manner of ſin what-"ſoever that men have committed is capable of par-"don, excepting only the ſin againſt the HOLY "GHOST." And though the apoſtle here uſes a very ſevere expreſſion, that "if ſuch perſons fall "away, it is impoſſible to renew them again to re-"pentance;" yet I have ſhewn that there is no neceſſity of underſtanding this phraſe in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the word "impoſſible;" but as it is elſewhere uſed, for that "which is extremely difficult." Nor indeed will our SAVIOUR's declaration, which I mentioned before, that all ſins whatſoever are pardonable, except "the ſin againſt the HOLY GHOST,"

ſuffer

ſuffer us to underſtand theſe words in the moſt rigorous ſenſe. SERM. CXXI.

3dly, The ſin here ſpoken of, is not a partial apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion by any particular vicious practice. Whoſoever lives in the habitual practice of any ſin plainly forbidden by the chriſtian law, may be ſaid ſo far to have apoſtatized from chriſtianity; but this is not the falling away which the apoſtle here ſpeaks of. This may be bad enough, and the greater ſins any man who profeſſeth himſelf a chriſtian lives in, the more notoriouſly he contradicts his profeſſion, and falls off from chriſtianity, and the nearer he approaches to the ſin in the text, and the danger there threatned: but yet for all that, this is not that which the apoſtle ſpeaks of.

4thly, But it is a total apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion, more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry, the renouncing of the true GOD, and our SAVIOUR, and the worſhip of falſe gods which the apoſtle here ſpeaks of. And this will be evident, if we conſider the occaſion and main ſcope of this epiſtle. And that was to confirm the Jews, who had newly embraced chriſtianity, in the profeſſion of that religion; and to keep them from apoſtatizing from it, becauſe of the perſecutions and ſufferings which attended that profeſſion. It pleaſed GOD, when chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world, to permit the powers of the world to raiſe a vehement perſecution againſt the profeſſors of it, by reaſon whereof many out of baſe fear did apoſtatize from it, and in teſtimony of their renouncing it, were forced to ſacrifice to the heathen idols. This is that which the apoſtle endeavours to caution and arm men againſt throughout this epiſtle. Chap. ii. 1. "therefore we ought to give the more earneſt

"heed

SERM. CXXI.

" heed to the things which we have heard, leſt at " any time we ſhould fall away:" and chap. iii. 12. it is called " an evil heart of unbelief to apoſtatize " from the living GOD." " Take heed, brethren, leſt " there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief to " depart from the living GOD;" that is, to fall from the worſhip of the true GOD to idolatry. And chap. x. 23. " Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith " without wavering, not forſaking the aſſembling of " ourſelves together:" that is, not declining the aſſemblies of chriſtians for fear of perſecution; and ver. 26. it is called " a ſinning wilfully, after we " have received the knowledge of the truth;" and ver. 39. " a drawing back to perdition." And chap. xii. it is call'd by way of eminency, " the ſin " which ſo eaſily beſets;" the ſin which in thoſe times of perſecution, they were ſo liable to.

And I doubt not but this is the ſin which St. John ſpeaks of, and calls, " the ſin unto death," and does not require chriſtians " to pray for thoſe who fall into " it," with any aſſurance that it ſhall be forgiven; 1 John v. 16. " There is a ſin unto death; I do " not ſay that he ſhall pray for it. All unrighteouſneſs " is ſin, and there is a ſin not unto death." " We " know that whoſoever is born of GOD, ſinneth not;" that is, does not fall into the ſin of apoſtaſy from chriſtianity to that of the heathen idolatry: " but " he that is begotten of GOD keepeth himſelf, and " that wicked one toucheth him not;" and then ver. 21. he adds this caution, " little children, keep " yourſelves from idols." Which ſufficiently ſhews what that ſin was which he was ſpeaking of before.

So that this being the ſin which the apoſtle deſign'd to caution men againſt throughout this epiſtle, it is very

very evident what "falling away" it is he here speaks of, namely, a total apostasy from christianity, and more especially to the heathen idolatry.

5thly, We will consider the reason of the difficulty of recovering such persons by repentance. "If "they fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew "them again to repentance;" and that for these three reasons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin.

2. Because it renounceth, and casteth off the means of recovery.

3. Because it is so high a provocation of GOD to withdraw his grace from such persons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin, both in the nature and circumstances of it. It is downright apostasy from GOD, a direct renouncing of him, and rejecting of his truth, after men have owned it, and been inwardly persuaded and convinced of it, and so the apostle expresseth it in this epistle, calling it "an apostasy from the living "GOD, a sinning wilfully after we have received "the knowledge of the truth." It hath all the aggravations that a crime is capable of, being against the clearest light and knowledge, and the fullest conviction of a man's mind, concerning the truth and goodness of that religion which he renounceth; against the greatest obligations laid upon him by the grace and mercy of the gospel; after the free pardon of sins, and the grace and assistance of GOD's SPIRIT received, and a miraculous power conferr'd for a witness and testimony to themselves, of the undoubted truth of that religion which they have embraced. It is the highest affront to the SON of GOD, who revealed this religion to the world, and sealed

SERM. CXXI.

ſealed it with his blood; and, in effect, an expreſſion of as high malice to the author of this religion, as the Jews were guilty of when they put him to ſo cruel and ſhameful a death.

Now a ſin of this heinous nature is apt naturally either to plunge men into hardneſs and impenitency, or to drive them to deſpair; and either of theſe conditions are effectual bars to their recovery. And both theſe dangers the apoſtle warns men of in this epiſtle. Chap. iii. 12, 13. "Take heed, brethren, leſt there "be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to "apoſtatize from the living GOD: but exhort one "another daily, whilſt it is called to day, leſt any "of you be hardned through the deceitfulneſs "of ſin." Or elſe the reflexion upon ſo horrid a crime is apt to drive a man to deſpair; as it did Judas, who after he had betray'd the SON of GOD, could find no eaſe but by making away himſelf; the guilt of ſo great a ſin filled him with ſuch terrors, that he was glad to fly to death for refuge, and to lay violent hands upon himſelf. And this likewiſe was the caſe of Spira, whoſe apoſtaſy though it was not total from the chriſtian religion, but only from the purity and reformation of it, brought him to that deſperation of mind which was a kind of hell upon earth. And of this danger likewiſe the apoſtle admoniſheth, chap. xii. 15. "Looking dili-"gently, leſt any man fail of the grace of GOD "(or as it is in our margin, leſt any man fall from "the grace of GOD) leſt any root of bitterneſs "ſpringing up trouble you;" and then he compares the caſe of ſuch perſons to Eſau, who, when he had renounced his birthright, to which the bleſſing was annexed, was afterwards, when he would have

have inherited the blessing, rejected, and "found "no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

2dly, Those who are guilty of this sin, do renounce and cast off the means of their recovery; and therefore it becomes extremely difficult "to renew them "again to repentance." They reject the gospel, which affords the best arguments and means to repentance, and renounce the only way of pardon and forgiveness. And certainly that man is in a very sad and desperate condition, the very nature of whose disease is to reject the remedy that should cure him. And this the apostle tells us, was the condition of those who apostatized from the gospel, chap. x. 26, 27. "For if we sin wilfully after we have received "the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no "more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking "for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which "shall devour the adversary." The great sacrifice and propitiation for sin was "the SON of GOD;" and they who renounce him, what way of expiation can they hope for afterward? what can they expect but to fall into his hands as a judge, whom they have rejected as a sacrifice and a SAVIOUR? And then,

3dly, Those who are guilty of this sin, provoke GOD in the highest manner to withdraw his grace and HOLY SPIRIT from them, by the power and efficacy whereof they should by brought to repentance; so that it can hardly otherwise be expected, but that GOD should leave those to themselves, who have so unworthily forsaken him; and wholly withdraw his grace and SPIRIT from such persons as have so notoriously "offered despite to the SPIRIT "of grace."

5.

SERM. CXXI.

I do not ſay that GOD always does this, he is ſometimes better to ſuch perſons than they have deſerved from him, and ſaves thoſe who have done what they can to undo themſelves, and mercifully puts forth his hand to recover them who were "drawing "back to perdition;" eſpecially if they were ſuddenly ſurprized by the violence of temptation, and yielded to it not deliberately and out of choice, but merely through weakneſs and infirmity, and ſo ſoon as they reflected upon themſelves, did return and repent: this was the caſe of St. Peter, who being ſurprized with a ſudden fear denied CHRIST; but being admoniſh'd of his ſin by the ſignal which our SAVIOUR had given him, he was recovered by a ſpeedy and hearty repentance. And ſo likewiſe ſeveral of the primitive chriſtians, who, were at firſt overcome by fear to renounce their religion, did afterwards recover themſelves, and dy'd reſolute martyrs: but it is a very dangerous ſtate, out of which but few recover, and with great difficulty.

And thus I have done with the five things I propounded to make out, for the clearing of this text from the miſtakes and miſapprehenſions which have been about it. I ſhall now draw ſome uſeful inferences from hence by way of application, that we may ſee how far this doth concern ourſelves; and they ſhall be theſe.

1ſt, From the ſuppoſition here in the text, that ſuch perſons as are there deſcribed (namely, thoſe who have been baptized, and by baptiſm have received remiſſion of ſins, and did firmly believe the goſpel, and the promiſes of it, and were endowed with miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST) that theſe may fall away; this ſhould caution us all againſt confidence

confidence and ſecurity; when thoſe that have gone thus far may fall, "let him that ſtandeth take "heed." SERM. CXXI.

Some are of opinion, that thoſe whom the apoſtle here deſcribes are true and ſincere chriſtians, and that when he ſays, "it is impoſſible if they fall away, to "renew them again to repentance," he means that they cannot fall away totally, ſo as to ſtand in need of being renewed again to repentance: but this is directly contrary to the apoſtle's deſign, which was to caution chriſtians againſt apoſtaſy, becauſe if they did fall away, their recovery would be ſo exceeding difficult; which argument does plainly ſuppoſe that they might fall away.

On the other hand, there are others who think the perſons, here deſcribed by the apoſtle, to be hypocritical chriſtians, who for ſome baſe ends had entertained chriſtianity, and put on the profeſſion of it, but not being ſincere and in good earneſt, would forſake it when perſecution came. But beſides that this is contrary to the deſcription which the apoſtle makes of theſe perſons, who are ſaid "to have taſted "of the heavenly gift, and to have been made partakers of the HOLY GHOST;" by which if we underſtand juſtification and remiſſion of ſins, and the ſanctifying virtue of the HOLY GHOST, which in all probability is the meaning of theſe phraſes, theſe are bleſſings which did not belong to hypocrites, and which GOD does not beſtow upon them; I ſay, beſides this, there is no reaſon to imagine that the apoſtle intended ſuch perſons, when it is likely that there were very few hypocrites in thoſe times of perſecution; for what ſhould tempt men to diſſemble chriſtianity, when it was ſo dangerous a profeſſion?

SERM. CXXI.

or what worldly ends could men have in taking that profeſſion upon them, which was ſo directly contrary to their worldly intereſts?

So that upon the whole matter, I doubt not but the apoſtle here means thoſe who are real in the profeſſion of chriſtianity, and that ſuch "might fall "away." For we may eaſily imagine, that men might be convinced of the truth and goodneſs of the chriſtian doctrine, and in good earneſt embrace the profeſſion of it, and yet not be ſo perfectly weaned from the world, and ſo firmly rooted and eſtabliſhed in that perſuaſion, as when it came to the trial, to be able to quite all for it, and to bear up againſt all the terrors and aſſaults of perſecution; ſo that they might be real chriſtians, and no hypocrites, though they were not ſo perfectly eſtabliſhed and confirmed, and ſo ſincerely reſolved as many others. They were not like St. Paul, and thoſe tried perſons whom he ſpeaks of, Rom. viii. 35, 37. "Who ſhall ſeparate "us from the love of CHRIST? ſhall tribulation, "or diſtreſs, or perſecution, or famine, or nakedneſs, "or peril, or ſword? nay, in all theſe things we are "more than conquerors." (They had been tried by all theſe, and yet had held out) upon which he breaks out into thoſe triumphant expreſſions; "I am per-"ſuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, "nor principalities, nor powers, nor things preſent, "nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor "any other creature, ſhall be able to ſeparate us "from the love of GOD, which is in CHRIST JESUS "our LORD." They might not (I ſay) be like thoſe: and yet for all that be real in their profeſſion of chriſtianity, and no hypocrites.

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In short, I take them to be such as our SAVIOUR describes him to be "who received the seed "into stony places," namely, "he that heareth "the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet "hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a "while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth "because of the word, by and by he is offended." This is no description of a hypocrite; but of one that was real, as far as he went (for he is said "to "receive the word with joy") but was not well rooted, and come to such a confirmed state, as resolutely to withstand the assaults of persecution.

So that tho' we have truly embraced christianity, and are in a good degree sincere in the profession of it, yet there is great reason why we should neither be "secure nor confident in our selves." "Not secure," because there is great danger that our resolutions may be born down one time or other by the assaults of temptation, if we be not continually vigilant, and upon our guard. "Not confi-"dent in our selves," because "we stand by faith, "and faith is the gift of GOD;" therefore as the apostle infers, "we should not be high-minded, "but fear." Men may have gone a great way in christianity, and have been sincere in their profession of it; and yet afterwards may apostatize in the foulest manner, not only fall off to a vicious life, but even desert the profession of their religion. I would to GOD the experience of the world did not give us too much reason to believe the possibility of this. When we see so many revolt from the profession of the reformed religion, to the corruptions and superstitions of Rome; and others from a religious and sober life, to plunge themselves into all

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SERM. CXXI.

kind of lewdneſs and debauchery, and it is to be feared, into atheiſm and infidelity; can we doubt any longer whether it be poſſible for chriſtians to fall away? I wiſh we were as certain of the poſſibility of their recovery, as we are of their falling, and that we had as many examples of the one as of the other.

Let us then be very vigilant over ourſelves, and according to the apoſtle's exhortation, 2 Pet. iii. 17. "Seeing we know theſe things before, beware, leſt "we alſo being led away with the error of the "wicked, fall from our own ſtedfaſtneſs."

2dly, This ſhews us how great an aggravation it is, for men to ſin againſt the means of knowledge which the goſpel affords, and the mercies which it offers unto them. That which aggravated the ſin of theſe perſons was, that after they "were "once enlightned," that is, at their baptiſm were inſtructed in the chriſtian doctrine, the cleareſt and moſt perfect revelation that ever was made of GOD's will to mankind, that after they were "juſtified "freely by GOD's grace," and had received remiſſion of ſins, and had many other benefits conferred upon them; that after all this, they ſhould fall off from this "holy religion." This was that which did ſo heighten and inflame their guilt, and made their caſe ſo near deſperate. The two great aggravations of crimes are wilfulneſs and ingratitude; if a crime be wilfully committed, and committed againſt one that hath obliged us by the greateſt favours and benefits. Now he commits a fault wilfully, who does it againſt the clear knowledge of his duty. Ignorance excuſeth; for ſo far as a man is ignorant of the evil he does, ſo far the

action

action is involuntary: but knowledge makes it to be a wilful fault. And this is a more peculiar aggravation of the ſins of chriſtians, becauſe GOD hath afforded to them the greateſt means and opportunities of knowledge; that revelation which GOD hath made of his will to the world by our bleſſed SAVIOUR, is the cleareſt light that ever mankind had, and the mercies which the goſpel brings are the greateſt that ever were offer'd to the ſons of men; the free pardon and remiſſion of all our ſins, and the aſſiſtance of GOD's grace and HOLY SPIRIT, to help the weakneſs of our nature, and enable us to do what GOD requires of us. So that we who ſin after baptiſm, after the knowledge of chriſtianity, and thoſe great bleſſings which the goſpel beſtows on mankind, are of all perſons in the world the moſt inexcuſable. The ſins of heathens bear no proportion to ours, becauſe they never enjoyed thoſe means of knowledge, never had thoſe bleſſings conferred upon them, which chriſtians are partakers of; ſo that we may apply to our ſelves thoſe ſevere words of the apoſtle in this epiſtle, "how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect "ſo great ſalvation?" hear how our SAVIOUR aggravates the faults of men upon this account, of the wilfulneſs of them, and their being committed againſt the expreſs knowledge of GOD's will; Luke xii. 47, 48. "The ſervant which knew his lord's "will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did ac- "cording to his will, ſhall be beaten with many "ſtripes; for unto whomſoever much is given, of "him ſhall much be required; and to whom men "have committed much, of him they will ask the "more." The means and mercies of the goſpel

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SERM. CXXI.

are ſo many talents committed to our truſt, of the neglect whereof a ſevere account will be taken at the day of judgment. If we be wilful offenders, there is no excuſe for us, and little hopes of pardon. "If we ſin wilfully after we have received "the knowledge of the truth," (ſays the apoſtle in this epiſtle) "there remains no more ſacrifice for "ſin." I know the apoſtle ſpeaks this particularly of the ſin of apoſtaſy from chriſtianity; but it is in proportion true of all other ſins, which thoſe who have received the knowledge of the truth are guilty of. They, who after they have entertained chriſtianity, and made ſome progreſs in it, and been in ſome meaſure reformed by it, do again relapſe into any vicious courſe, do thereby render their condition very dangerous. So St. Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "If after they have eſcaped the pollu-"tions of the world through the knowledge of the "LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, "they are again entangled therein, and overcome, "the latter end is worſe with them than the begin-"ning. For it had been better for them, not to "have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after "they have known it, to turn from the holy com-"mandment delivered unto them." Therefore we may do well to conſider ſeriouſly what we do, when under the means and opportunities of knowledge which the goſpel affords us, and the ineſtimable bleſſings and favours which it confers upon us, we live in any wicked and vicious courſe. Our ſins are not of a common rate, when they have ſo much of wilfulneſs and unworthineſs in them. If men ſhall be ſeverely puniſh'd for living againſt the light of nature; what vengeance ſhall be poured on thoſe who

who offend against the glorious light of the gospel? "this is the condemnation, that light is come, &c." SERM. CXXI.

3dly, The consideration of what hath been said is matter of comfort to those, who upon every failing and infirmity are afraid they have committed "the "unpardonable sin," and that it is impossible for them to be restor'd by repentance. There are many who being of a dark and melancholy temper, are apt to represent things worse to themselves than there is reason for, and do many times fancy themselves guilty of great crimes, in the doing or neglecting of those things which in their nature are indifferent, are apt to aggravate and blow up every little infirmity into an unpardonable sin. Most men are apt to extenuate their sins, and not to be sensible enough of the evil and heinousness of them; but it is the peculiar infelicity of melancholy persons to look upon their faults as blacker and greater than in truth they are; and whatsoever they hear and read in scripture, that is spoken against the grossest and most enormous offenders, they apply to themselves; and when they hear of the "sin against the HOLY GHOST," and "the "sin unto death," or read this text which I am now treating of, they presently conclude that they are guilty of these sins, and that this is a description of their case. Whereas "the sin against the "HOLY GHOST" is of that nature, that probably none but those that saw our SAVIOUR's miracles are capable of committing it; and excepting that, there is no sin whatsoever that is unpardonable. As for "the sin unto death," and that here spoken of in the text, I have shewn that they are a total apostasy from the christian religion, more especially

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SERM. CXXI.

to the heathen idolatry; which theſe perſons I am ſpeaking of, have no reaſon to imagine themſelves guilty of. And though great and notorious crimes committed by chriſtians may come near to this, and it may be very hard for thoſe who are guilty of them, to recover themſelves again to repentance; yet to be ſure, for the common frailties and infirmities of humane nature, there is an open way of pardon in the goſpel, and they are many times forgiven to us upon a general repentance; ſo that upon account of theſe, which is commonly the caſe of the perſons I am ſpeaking of, there is not the leaſt ground of deſpair; and though it be hard many times for ſuch perſons to receive comfort, yet it is eaſy to give it, and that upon ſure grounds, and as clear evidence of ſcripture, as there is for any thing; ſo that the firſt thing that ſuch perſons, who are ſo apt to judge thus hardly of themſelves, are to be convinced of (if poſſible) is this, that they ought rather to truſt the judgment of others concerning themſelves, than their own imagination, which is ſo diſtemper'd, that it cannot make a true repreſentation of things. I know that where melancholy does mightily prevail, it is hard to perſuade people of this: but till they be perſuaded of it, I am ſure all the reaſon in the world will ſignify nothing to them.

4thly, This ſhould make men afraid of great and preſumptuous ſins, which come near apoſtaſy from chriſtianity; ſuch as deliberate murder, adultery, groſs fraud and oppreſſion, or notorious and habitual intemperance. For what great difference is there, whether men renounce chriſtianity; or profeſſing to believe it, "do in their works deny it?" ſome of theſe ſins which I have mention'd, particularly

larly murder and adultery, were ranked in the ſame degree with apoſtaſy by the ancient church; and ſo ſevere was the diſcipline of many churches, that perſons guilty of theſe crimes were never admitted to the peace and communion of the church again, whatever teſtimony they gave of their repentance. I will not ſay but this was too rigorous; but this ſhews how inconſiſtent with chriſtianity theſe crimes, and others of the like degree of heinouſneſs, were in thoſe days thought to be. They did not indeed, as Tertullian tells us, think ſuch perſons abſolutely incapable of the mercy of GOD; but after ſuch a fall, ſo notorious a contradiction to their chriſtian profeſſion, they thought it unfit afterwards that they ſhould ever be reckon'd in the number of chriſtians. SERM. CXXI.

5thly, It may be uſeful for us upon this occaſion to reflect a little upon the ancient diſcipline of the church, which in ſome places (as I have told you) was ſo ſevere, as in caſe of ſome great crimes after baptiſm, as apoſtaſy to the heathen idolatry, murder, and adultery, never to admit thoſe that were guilty of them, to the peace and communion of the church; but all churches were ſo ſtrict, as not to admit thoſe who fell after baptiſm into great and notorious crimes, to reconciliation with the church, but after a long and tedious courſe of penance, after the greateſt and moſt publick teſtimonies of ſorrow and repentance, after long faſting and tears, and the greateſt ſigns of humiliation that can be imagined. In caſe of the greateſt offences they were ſeldom reconciled, till they came to lie upon their death-beds: and in caſe of other ſcandalous ſins, not 'till after the humiliation of many years. This perhaps may be thought too great ſeverity; but I am ſure we are as

SERM. CXXI.

much too remiss now, as they were over-rigorous then: but was the ancient discipline of the church in any degree put in practice now, what case would the generality of christians be in? in what herds and shoals would men be driven out of the communion of the church? 'tis true, the prodigious degeneracy and corruption of christians hath long since broke these bounds, and 'tis morally impossible to revive the strictness of the ancient discipline in any measure, till the world grow better; but yet we ought to reflect, with shame and confusion of face, upon the purer ages of the church, and sadly to consider, how few among us would in those days have been accounted christians; and upon this consideration to be provoked to an emulation of those better times, and to a reformation of those faults and miscarriages, which in the best days of christianity were reckon'd inconsistent with the christian profession; and to remember that though the discipline of the church be not now the same it was then, yet the judgment and severity of GOD is; and that those who live in any vicious course of life, though they continue in the communion of the church, yet they shall be "shut "out of the kingdom of GOD." "We are sure "that the judgment of GOD will be according to "truth, against them which commit such things."

6thly, and lastly, the consideration of what hath been said, should confirm and establish us in the profession of our holy religion. 'Tis true, we are not now in danger of apostatizing from christianity to the heathen idolatry; but we have too many sad examples of those who apostatize from the profession of the gospel, which they have taken upon them in baptism, to atheism and infidelity, to all manner of impiety

impiety and lewdneſs. There are many who daily fall off from the profeſſion of the reformed religion, to the groſs errors and ſuperſtitions of the Roman church, which in many things does too nearly reſemble the old pagan idolatry. And what the apoſtle here ſays of the apoſtates of his time, is proportionably true of thoſe of our days, that "they who thus fall away," it is "extremely dif-"ficult to renew them again to repentance." And it ought to be remembred, that the guilt of this kind of apoſtaſy hath driven ſome to deſpair; as in the caſe of Spira, who, for reſiſting the light and convictions of his mind, was caſt into thoſe agonies, and fill'd with ſuch terrors, as if "the very pains of "hell had taken hold on him;" and in that fearful deſpair, and in the midſt of thoſe horrors, he breathed out his ſoul.

SERM. CXXI.

"Let us then hold faſt the profeſſion of our "faith without wavering;" and let us take heed how we contradict the profeſſion of our faith, by any impiety and wickedneſs in our lives; remembring that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the "hands of the living God." I will conclude with the words of the apoſtle immediately after the text, "the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh "oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for "them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth bleſſing "from GOD. But that which beareth thorns and "briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto curſing, whoſe "end is to be burned." And how gladly would I add the next words! "but, beloved, we are per-"ſuaded better things of you, and things that ac-"company ſalvation, though we thus ſpeak."

SERMON

SERMON CXXII.

CHRIST the author, and obedience the condition of ſalvation.

HEB. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey him.

SERM. CXXII.

THIS is ſpoken of CHRIST, our great high-prieſt under the goſpel; upon the excellency of whoſe perſon, and the efficacy of his ſacrifice for the eternal benefit and ſalvation of mankind, the apoſtle inſiſts ſo largely in this, and the following chapters; but the ſum of all is briefly comprehended in the text, that our high-prieſt "being made perfect, became the author of "eternal ſalvation to them that obey him."

In which words we have theſe four things conſiderable.

1ſt, the great bleſſing and benefit here ſpoken of, and that is "eternal ſalvation;" and this implies in it, not only our deliverance from hell, and redemption from eternal miſery; but the obtaining of eternal life and happineſs for us.

2dly, the author of this great bleſſing and benefit to mankind; and that is "JESUS CHRIST the "SON of GOD," who is here repreſented to us under the notion of our high-prieſt, who, by making atonement for us, and reconciling us to GOD, is ſaid to be the "author of eternal ſalvation" to mankind.

3dly,

3dly, the way and means whereby he became the author of our salvation; "being made perfect, "he became the author of eternal salvation." The word is τηλειωθεὶς, having consummated his work, and finish'd his course, and receiv'd the reward of it. For this word hath an allusion to those that run in a race, where he that wins receives the crown. And to this the apostle plainly alludes, Phil. iii. 12. where he says, "not as though I had already "attained," οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον, not as if I had already taken hold of the prize; but I am pressing, or reaching forward towards it; ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, or were already perfect; that is, not as if I had finish'd my course, or had the prize or crown in my hand; but I am pressing forward towards it. In like manner, our blessed SAVIOUR, when he had finish'd the course of his humiliation and obedience, which was accomplish'd in his sufferings, and had receiv'd the reward of them, being risen from the dead, and exalted to the right-hand of GOD, and crown'd with glory and honour, he is said to be τελειωθεὶς made perfect; and therefore when he was giving up the ghost upon the cross, he said, John xix. 30. "τετέλεσται, it is finish'd," or perfected; that is, he had done all that was necessary to be done, by way of suffering, for our redemption. And the same word is likewise used Luke xiii. 32. concerning our SAVIOUR's sufferings, "I do cures "to day and to morrow, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι, and "the third day I shall be perfected;" this he spake concerning his own death. And therefore chap. ii. 10. GOD is said "to make the captain "of our salvation perfect through sufferings; διὰ "παθημάτων τελειῶσαι." And thus our high-priest being

SERM. CXXII.

SERM. CXXII. being made perfect in this sense, that is, having finish'd his course, which was accomplished in his sufferings, and having received the reward of them, in being exalted at the right-hand of GOD, "he "became the author of eternal salvation to us."

4thly, you have here the qualifications of the persons, who are made partakers of this great benefit, or the condition upon which it is suspended, and that is "obedience;" "he became the author of "eternal salvation to them that obey him."

These are the main things contained in the text. For the fuller explication whereof, I shall take into consideration these five things.

1st, how, and by what means CHRIST is the "author of our salvation."

2dly, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3dly, we will consider the possibility of performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4thly, the necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

And 5thly, I shall shew that this is no prejudice to the law "of faith," and the "free grace and "mercy of GOD," declared in the gospel.

1st, we will consider how, and by what means "CHRIST is the author of our salvation;" and this is contain'd in these words, "being made perfect he "became the author of eternal salvation," that is (as I told you before) having finish'd his course which was accomplish'd in his last sufferings; and having received the reward of them, being exalted at the right-

right-hand of GOD, he became the "author of eter- "nal salvation" to us; so that by all he did, and suffer'd for us, in the days of his flesh, and in the state of his humiliation, and by all that he still continues to do for us, now that he is in heaven at the right-hand of GOD; he hath effected and brought about the great work of our salvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and sufferings, his resurrection from the dead, and his powerful intercession for us at the right-hand of GOD, have all a great influence upon the reforming and saving of mankind; and by all these ways and means, he is the author and cause of our salvation; as a rule, and as a pattern, as a price and propitiation, and as a patron and advocate that is continually pleading our cause, and interceeding with GOD on our behalf, "for mercy and grace "to help in time of need."

And indeed our condition requir'd an high-priest who was qualified in all these respects, for the recovery of mankind out of that corrupt and degenerate state into which it was sunk; an high-priest "whose lips should preserve knowledge," and from whose mouth we might learn the law of GOD; whose life should be a perfect pattern of holiness to us, and his death a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and by whose grace and assistance we should be endowed with power and strength to mortify our lusts; and to perfect holiness in the fear of GOD; and therefore "such "an high-priest became us, who was holy, harmless, "undefiled, and separate from sinners, who might "have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are "out of the way, and being himself compass'd "with infirmities, might have the feeling of ours, "being in all points tempted as we are, only with-

SERM. CXXII.

" out ſin;" and in a word, " might be able to " ſave to the utmoſt all thoſe that come to GOD by " him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for " us."

By theſe qualifications our high-prieſt is deſcribed in this epiſtle; and by theſe he is every way ſuited to all our defects and infirmities, all our wants and neceſſities; to inſtruct our ignorance by his doctrine, and to lead us in the path of righteouſneſs by his moſt holy and moſt exemplary life; to expiate the guilt of our ſins by his death; and to procure grace and aſſiſtance for us, by his prevalent interceſſion on our behalf. By all theſe ways, and in all theſe reſpects, he is ſaid to be " the author of eternal ſalvation."

1ſt, by the holineſs and purity of his doctrine, whereby we are perfectly inſtructed in the will of GOD and our duty, and powerfully excited and perſuaded to the practice of it. The rules and directions of a holy life were very obſcure before, and the motives and encouragements to virtue but weak and ineffectual, in compariſon of what they are now render'd by the revelation of the goſpel. The general corruption of mankind, and the vicious practice of the world, had in a great meaſure blurr'd and defac'd the natural law; ſo that the heathen world, for many ages, had but a very dark and doubtful knowledge of their duty, eſpecially as to ſeveral inſtances of it. The cuſtom of ſeveral vices had ſo prevail'd among mankind, as almoſt quite to extinguiſh the natural ſenſe of their evil and deformity. And the Jews, who enjoy'd a conſiderable degree of divine revelation, had no ſtrict regard to the morality of their actions; and contenting themſelves with ſome kind of outward conformity to

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the bare letter of the ten commandments, were almost wholly taken up with little ceremonies and observances, in which they placed the main of their religion, almost wholly neglecting the greater duties and "weightier matters of the law."

And therefore our blessed SAVIOUR, to free mankind from these wanderings and uncertainties about the will of GOD, revealed the moral law, and explained the full force and meaning of it, clearing all doubts, and supplying all the defects of it, by a more particular and explicit declaration of the several parts of our duty, and by precepts of greater perfection, than the world was sufficiently acquainted withal before; of greater humility and more universal charity; of abstaining from revenge and forgiving injuries, and returning to our enemies good for evil, and love for ill-will, and blessings and prayers for curses and persecutions. These virtues indeed were sometimes, and yet but very rarely, recommended before in the counsels of wise men; but either not in that degree of perfection, or not under that degree of necessity, and as having the force of laws, and laying an universal obligation of indispensible duty upon all mankind.

And as our blessed SAVIOUR hath given a greater clearness, and certainty, and perfection, to the rule of our duty, so he hath reveal'd, and brought into a clearer light, more powerful motives and encouragements to the constant and careful practice of it; for "life and immortality are brought to light by "the gospel;" the resurrection of CHRIST from the dead being a plain and convincing demonstration of the immortality of our souls, and another life after this, and an evidence to us both of his

SERM. CXXII.

power, and of the fidelity of his promiſe, to raiſe us from the dead. Not but that mankind had ſome obſcure apprehenſions of theſe things before. Good men had always good hopes of another life and future rewards in another world; and the worſt of men were not without ſome fears of the judgment and vengeance of another world; but men had diſputed themſelves into great doubts and uncertainties about theſe things; and as men that are in doubt, are almoſt indifferent which way they go; ſo the uncertain apprehenſions which men had of a future ſtate, and of the rewards and puniſhments of another world had but a very faint influence upon the minds of men, and wanted that preſſing and determining force to virtue and a good life, which a firm belief and clear conviction of theſe things, would have infuſed into them.

But now "the light of the glorious goſpel of "CHRIST" hath ſcattered all theſe clouds, and chaſed away that groſs darkneſs which hid the other world from our ſight, and hath removed all doubts concerning the immortality of mens ſouls, and their future ſtate; and now the kingdom of heaven, with all its treaſures of life and happineſs, and glory, lies open to our view, and "hell is alſo naked before "us, and deſtruction hath no covering." So that the hopes and fears of men are now perfectly awakned, and all ſorts of conſiderations that may ſerve to quicken and encourage our obedience, and to deter and affrighten men from a wicked life, are expoſed to the view of all men, and do ſtare every man's conſcience in the face. And this is that which renders the goſpel ſo admirable and powerful an inſtrument for the reforming of mankind, and, as

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the apostle calls it "the mighty power of GOD unto "salvation;" because therein life and immortality are set before us, as the certain and glorious reward of our obedience; and therein also "the wrath of "GOD is revealed from heaven, against all ungod- "lines and unrighteousnes of men." So that considering the perfection of our rule, and the powerful enforcements of it upon the consciences of men, by the clear discovery and firm assurance of the eternal recompence of another world; nothing can be imagined better suited to its end, than the doctrine of the gospel is to make men wise, and holy, and good unto salvation; both by instructing them perfectly in their duty, and urging them powerfully to the practice of it.

2dly, the example of our SAVIOUR's life is likewise another excellent means to this end. The law lays an obligation upon us; but a pattern gives life and encouragement, and renders our duty more easy, and practicable, and familiar to us; for here we see obedience to the divine law practised in our own nature, and performed by a man like ourselves, "in all "things like unto us, sin only excepted." 'Tis true indeed, this exception makes a great difference, and seems to take off very much from the encouraging force and virtue of this example. No wonder if he that was without sin, and was GOD as well as man, performed all righteousnes; and therefore, where is the encouragement of this example? that our nature, pure and uncorrupted, supported and assisted by the divinity to which it was united, should be perfectly conformed to the law of GOD, as it is no strange thing, so neither doth it seem to have that force and encouragement in it, which an example more

SERM. CXXII.

more ſuited to our weakneſs might have had. But then this cannot be deny'd, that it hath the advantage of perfection, which a pattern ought to have, and to which, though we can never attain, yet we may always be aſpiring towards it; and certainly we cannot better learn, how GOD would have men to live, than by ſeeing how GOD himſelf lived, when he was pleaſed to aſſume our nature, and to become man.

And then, we are to conſider that the SON of GOD did not aſſume our nature in its higheſt glory and perfection, but compaſs'd with infirmities, and liable in all points to be tempted like as we are; but ſtill it was without ſin; and therefore GOD doth not exact from us perfect obedience, and that we ſhould "fulfil all righteouſneſs," as he did; he makes allowance for the corruption of our nature, and is pleaſed to accept of our ſincere, though very imperfect obedience. But after all this, his humane nature was united to his divinity, and he had the "SPIRIT without meaſure;" and this would indeed make a wide difference between us and our pattern, as to the purpoſe of holineſs and obedience, if we were deſtitute of that aſſiſtance which is neceſſary to enable us to the diſcharge of our duty; but this GOD offers, and is ready to afford to us, for he hath promiſed "to give his HOLY SPIRIT to them that "ask him;" and "the SPIRIT of him that raiſed "up CHRIST JESUS from the dead" dwells in all good men, who ſincerely deſire to do the will of GOD; "in the working out our ſalvation, GOD "worketh in us both to will and to do."

So that as to that obedience which the goſpel requires of us, if we be not wanting to ourſelves; if we

we do not "receive the grace of GOD in vain," and "quench and resist his blessed SPIRIT," we may be as really assisted as the SON of GOD himself was; for, in this respect, all true and sincere christians are "the SONS of GOD;" so that St. Paul tells us, Rom. viii. 14. "As many as are led "by the SPIRIT of GOD, they are the sons of "GOD." SERM. CXXII.

So that if all things be duly consider'd, the life of our blessed SAVIOUR, as it is the most perfect, so in the main, it is a very proper pattern for our imitation, and could not have come nearer to us, without wanting that perfection which is necessary to a complete and absolute pattern. The SON of GOD condescended to every thing that might render him the most familiar and equal example to us, excepting that, which as it was impossible, so had been infinitely dishonourable to him, and would have spoil'd the perfection of his example; he came as near to us as was fit or possible "being in all things like unto us, "sin only excepted;" that is, abating that one thing, which he came to destroy and abolish, and which would have destroyed the very end of his coming; for if he had not been "without sin," he could neither have made an expiation for sin, nor have been a perfect pattern of holiness and obedience.

And as the life of our blessed SAVIOUR had all the perfection that is requisite to an absolute pattern (so that by considering his temper and spirit, and the actions of his life, we may reform all the vicious inclinations of our minds, and the exorbitances of our passions, and the errors and irregularities of our lives) so it is a very powerful example, and of great force to oblige and provoke us to the imitation of

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SERM. CXXII.

it; for it is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and have reaſon to love, above any perſon in the world: the example of our prince and ſovereign lord, of our beſt friend and greateſt benefactor, of the high-prieſt of our profeſſion, and the captain of our ſalvation, of the author and finiſher of our faith, of one who came down from heaven for our ſakes, and was contented to aſſume our nature together with the infirmities of it, and to live in a low and mean condition, for no other reaſon but that he might have the opportunity to inſtruct and lead mankind in the way to life, to deliver us from ſin and wrath, and to bring us to God and happineſs. 'Tis the example of one who laid down his life for us, and ſealed his love to us in his blood, and whilſt we were enemies, did and ſuffer'd more for us, than ever any man did for his friend.

And ſurely theſe conſiderations cannot but mightily recommend and endear to us this example of our LORD and SAVIOUR. We are ambitious to imitate thoſe whom we highly eſteem and reverence, and are apt to have their examples in great veneration, from whom we have received great kindneſſes and benefits, and are always endeavouring to be like thoſe whom we love, and are apt to conform our ſelves to the will and pleaſure of thoſe from whom we have received great favours, and who are continually heaping great obligations upon us.

So that whether we conſider the excellency of our pattern, or the mighty endearments of it to us, by that infinite love and kindneſs which he hath expreſs'd towards us, we have all the temptation, and all the provocation in the world, to endeavour to be like him; for who would not gladly tread in the

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ſteps of the SON of GOD, and of the beſt friend that the ſons of men ever had? who will not follow that example to which we ſtand indebted for the greateſt bleſſings and benefits that ever were procured for mankind? thus you ſee of what force and advantage the example of our bleſſed SAVIOUR is toward the recovery and ſalvation of mankind. SERM. CXXII.

3dly, he is "the author of eternal ſalvation," as he hath purchaſed it for us, by the merit of his obedience and ſufferings, by which he hath obtained eternal redemption for us; not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but eternal life and happineſs, when by our ſins we had juſtly incurred the wrath and diſpleaſure of almighty GOD, and were liable to eternal death and miſery. He was contented to be ſubſtituted a ſacrifice for us, "to bear our ſins in "his own body on the tree," and to expiate the guilt of all our offences by his own ſufferings. He died for us, that is, not only for our benefit and advantage, but in our place and ſtead; ſo that if he had not died we had eternally periſh'd; and becauſe he died, we are ſaved from that eternal ruin and puniſhment, which was due to us for our ſins.

And this, tho' it be no where in ſcripture call'd by the name or term of ſatisfaction, yet, which is the ſame thing in effect, it is call'd "the prize of "our redemption;" for as we are ſinners, we are liable and indebted to the juſtice of GOD, and our bleſſed SAVIOUR by his death and ſufferings hath diſcharged this obligation; which diſcharge, ſince it was obtained for us by "the ſhedding of his pre-"cious blood," "without which," the ſcripture expreſly ſays, "there had been no remiſſion of ſin," why it may not properly enough be called payment

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and satisfaction, I confess I cannot understand. Not that GOD was angry with his SON, for he was always well pleased with him; or that our SAVIOUR suffer'd the very same which the sinner should have done in his own person, the proper pains and torments of the damned: but that his perfect obedience and grievous sufferings, undergone for our sakes, and upon our account, were of that value and esteem with GOD, and his voluntary sacrifice of himself in our stead, so highly acceptable and well-pleasing to him, that he thereupon was pleased to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind; wherein he hath promised and engaged himself to forgive the sins of all those who sincerely repent and believe, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence it is, that the blood of CHRIST, which was shed for us upon the cross, is call'd "the blood of the covenant;" as being the sanction of that new covenant of the gospel, into which GOD is enter'd with mankind; and not only the confirmation, but the very foundation of it; for which reason, the cup in the LORD's supper (which represents to us the blood of CHRIST) is call'd "the new testament in his blood, which was shed "for many for the remission of sins."

4thly, and lastly, CHRIST is said to be "the "author of our salvation," in respect of his powerful and perpetual intercession for us at the right-hand of GOD. And this seems to be more especially intimated and intended, in that expression here in the text, that "being made perfect he became the author of "eternal salvation to them that obey him." Which words of "his being perfected," do, as I have shew'd before, more immediately refer to his sufferings,

ings, and the reward that followed them, "his exaltation at the right hand of GOD," where "he lives for ever to make intercession for us;" by which perpetual and most prevalent intercession of his, he procures all those benefits to be bestowed upon us, which he purchased for us by his death; the forgiveness of our sins, and our acceptance with GOD, and perfect restitution to his favour, upon our faith and repentance, and the grace and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT to enable us to a sincere discharge of our duty, to strengthen us against all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to keep us from all evil, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

And this is that which our apostle calls "obtaining of mercy, and finding grace to help in time of need," chap. iv. ver. 16. of this epist. Our blessed SAVIOUR now that he is advanced into heaven, and "exalted on the right-hand of the majesty on high," doth out of the tenderest affection and compassion to mankind, still prosecute that great and merciful design of our salvation, which was begun by him here on earth, and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and sufferings does offer up our prayers to GOD, and as it were plead our cause with GOD, and represent to him all our wants and necessities, and obtain a favourable answer of our petitions put up to GOD in his name, and all necessary supplies of grace and strength, proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And by virtue of this powerful intercession of our blessed SAVIOUR and REDEEMER, our sins are pardoned upon our sincere repentance, our prayers are graciously answered, our wants are abundantly sup-

SERM. CXXII.

plied, and the grace and assistance of GOD'S SPIRIT are plentifully afforded to us, to excite us to our duty, to strengthen us in well doing, to comfort us in afflictions, to support us under the greatest trials and sufferings, and "to keep us through faith "unto salvation."

And for this reason, as the purchasing of our salvation is in scripture attributed to the death and sufferings of CHRIST; so the perfecting and finishing of it is ascribed to the prevalency of his intercession at the right-hand of GOD for us. So the apostle tells us, chap. vii. ver. 25. that "he is able "to save to the uttermost all those that come to "GOD by him; seeing he ever liveth to make in-"tercession for us." He died once to purchase salvation for us; and that we may not fall short of it, but receive the full benefit of this purchase, "he "lives for ever to make intercession for us;" and thus "he saves to the uttermost all those that come "to GOD by him;" that is, he takes care of the whole business of our salvation from first to last. And now that he is in heaven, he is as intent to procure our welfare and happiness, and as tenderly concerned for us, as when he lived here among us upon earth, as when he hung upon the cross, and "poured out his soul an offering for our sins;" for he appears at the right-hand of GOD in our nature, that which he assumed for our sakes, which was made subject to, and sensible of our infirmities, and which "was tempted in all things like as we are, "only without sin;" and therefore "he knows "how to pity and succour them that are tempted;" and from the remembrance of his own sufferings, is prompted to a compassionate sense of ours, and never

never ceaſeth in virtue of his blood, which was ſhed for us, to plead our cauſe with GOD, and to intercede powerfully in our behalf. SERM. CXXII.

So that the virtue and efficacy of CHRIST's interceſſion on our behalf, is founded in the redemption, which he wrought for us, by his blood and ſufferings; which, being enter'd into heaven, he repreſents to GOD on our behalf. As the high-prieſt under the law did enter into the holy place, with the blood of the ſacrifice that had been offered, and in virtue of that blood interceded for the people: "ſo CHRIST by his own blood enter'd into "the holy place, having obtained eternal redemp-"tion for us:" as the apoſtle ſpeaks, chap. ix. ver. 12. he enter'd into "the holy place," that is "into heaven it ſelf," to make interceſſion for us, as the apoſtle explains himſelf, ver. 24. "CHRIST "is not enter'd into the holy places which are "made with hands; but into heaven it ſelf, to ap-"pear in the preſence of GOD for us." And chap. x. ver. 12. ſpeaking of CHRIST's appearing for us at the right-hand of GOD, "this man "(ſays he) after he had offer'd one ſacrifice for ſin "for ever" (that is, a ſacrifice of perpetual virtue and efficacy) "ſat down at the right-hand of GOD," that is to intercede for us in virtue of that ſacrifice.

From all which it appears that the virtue of CHRIST's mediation and interceſſion for us in heaven, is founded in his ſacrifice, and the price of our redemption which he paid on earth, in ſhedding his blood for us.

From whence the apoſtle reaſons, that "there is "but one mediator between GOD and man," by whom we are to addreſs our prayers to GOD;

1 Tim.

SERM. CXXII.

1 Tim. ii. 5. "There is one GOD, and one mediator between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all." His mediation is founded in his ransom, or the price which he paid for our redemption. The apostle indeed does not say there is "but one mediator" between GOD and man in express words, but surely he means so; if by saying "there is one GOD," he means there is but one GOD; for they are joined together, and the very same expression used concerning both; "there is one GOD, "and one mediator between GOD and men:" that is, there is "but one GOD, and one mediator." But then, they of the church of Rome endeavour to avoid this plain text, by distinguishing between a mediator of redemption, and a mediator of intercession: but now if CHRIST's mediation, by way of intercession, be founded in the virtue of his redemption; then if there be but one mediator of redemption, then there is but one mediator of intercession in heaven for us. "There is "one GOD and one mediator between GOD and "men, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all." So that the power and prevalency of his intercession is founded in his ransom, that is, the price of our redemption; in virtue whereof alone he intercedes with GOD for us, as the apostle to the Hebrews does most plainly assert. So that all other intercessors in heaven for us are excluded from offering and presenting our prayers to GOD, besides "our high-priest, who is at the "right-hand of GOD, and lives for ever, to make "intercession for us," and by virtue of his intercession, "is able to save to the uttermost all those "that

" that come to GOD by him," that is, who put up their prayers to GOD in the alone virtue of his mediation. So that as there is no need of any other, if his intercession be available " to save to the ut- " termost: " so there is great danger in applying to any other (whether saint or angel, or even the blessed virgin) if the benefit of his intercession be limited to those " who come to GOD by him." And thus I have shewn by what means CHRIST is the author of our salvation; which was the first thing propos'd to be consider'd. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed to enquire into; namely, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification in those who hope for eternal salvation. And this I shall explain, first negatively, and then positively.

1st, negatively; it is not a meer outward profession of the christian religion, and owning of CHRIST for our LORD and lawgiver, that will be accepted in this case. " Not every one that saith " unto me, LORD, LORD, (saith our SAVI- " OUR) shall enter into the kingdom of GOD." By which we may very reasonably understand, all that profession of religion, which falls short of obedience and a holy life; as the profession of faith in CHRIST, being baptized into his name and religion, the mere belief of his doctrine, and the owning of him for our LORD and SAVIOUR; no, nor the external worship of him, and profession of subjection to him, by prayer and hearing his word and communicating in the holy sacrament. No, though this be set off in the most glorious manner, by prophesying and working miracles in his name; for so it follows in the next words, " many shall

" ſhall ſay to me in that day, LORD, LORD, " have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy " name have caſt out devils, and in thy name have " done many wondrous works? we have eat and " drunk in thy preſence, and have heard thee " preach in our ſtreets." But he tells us, that nothing of all this, without obedience to his laws, will be ſufficient to gain us admiſſion into heaven.

2dly, poſitively; that which GOD requires as a condition, and will accept as a qualification in thoſe who hope for eternal life, is faith in CHRIST and a ſincere and univerſal obedience to the precepts of his holy goſpel. " Not every one that ſaith " unto me, LORD, LORD, ſhall enter into the " kingdom of GOD: but he that doth the will of " my FATHER which is in heaven." And here in the text it is expreſly ſaid, that " CHRIST is the " author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him, " τοῖς ὑπακέσσιν ἀυτῷ," to them that hearken to him; that is, to them that do ſo hear and believe his goſpel, as to obey it; to them, and no other, he is " the author of eternal ſalvation."

And that we may the more clearly and diſtinctly underſtand what obedience it is, which the goſpel exacts as an indiſpenſible condition of eternal ſalvation, and a neceſſary qualification in all thoſe who hope to be made partakers of it; we may be pleaſed to conſider, that there is a virtual and an actual obedience to the laws of GOD; a perfect and ſincere obedience to them; the explication of theſe terms, will give us a diſtinct conception of the things we are ſpeaking of.

1ſt, there is a virtual, and there is an actual obedience to the laws of GOD. By an actual obedience, I mean

SERM. CXXII.

I mean the practice and exercise of the several graces and virtues of christianity, and the course and tenor of a holy life; when "out of a good conver-"sation men do shew forth their works," and by the outward actions of their lives, do give real testimony of their piety, justice, sobriety, humility, meekness, and charity, and all other christian graces and virtues, as occasion is ministred for the practice and exercise of them.

By a virtual obedience, I mean a sincere belief of the gospel, of the holiness and equity of its precepts, of the truth of its promises, and the terror of its threatnings, and a true repentance for all our sins. This is obedience in the root and principle; for he who sincerely believes the gospel, and does truly repent of the errors and miscarriages of his life, is firmly resolved to obey the commandments of GOD, and to walk before him, in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life; so that there is nothing that prevents or hinders this man's actual obedience to the laws of GOD, in the course of a holy and good life, but only the want of time and opportunity for it. And this was the case of those, who, upon the hearing of the gospel when it was first preached to them, did heartily embrace it, and turn from their sins, and the worship of idols, to the true and living GOD, but perhaps were cut off soon after; (as there were many who being but newly gained to christianity, were presently put to death, and suffer'd martyrdom for that profession;) there is no doubt to be made, but that in this case, a virtual obedience was in such persons a sufficient qualification for eternal life.

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SERM. CXXII.

But where there is time and opportunity for the exercise of our obedience, and the practice of the virtues of a holy life, there actual obedience to the laws and precepts of the gospel is necessary, to qualify us for eternal happiness; so that tho' a man do sincerely believe the gospel, and truly repent of his sins, and resolve upon a better life; yet if he do not afterwards in the course of his life put this resolution in practice, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentence," and amendment of life, and persevere in a holy course, his first resolution of obedience, though it were sincere, will not avail him to salvation. Nay, if he should continue for some time in the resolution and practice of a holy and virtuous life, and afterwards fall off from it, and "turn from the holy com-"mandment deliver'd unto him, his latter end "would be worse than his beginning; all his righ-"teousness that he hath done would not be remem-"bred; he shall die in his iniquity." For "with-"out holiness no man shall see the LORD." "If "any man draw back, GOD's soul will have no plea-"sure in him." This is so very clear and plain from scripture, that no man can entertain a contrary persuasion, without contradicting the whole tenor of the bible.

The sum of what I have said is this, that a virtual obedience and sincere faith and repentance are sufficient, where there is no time and opportunity for actual obedience and the practice of a good life: but where there is opportunity for actual obedience, and the continued practice of a good life, and perseverance therein; they are indispensably necessary in order to our eternal salvation, and a well grounded hope and assurance of it.

2dly, there

SERM. CXXII.

2dly, there is a perfect, and there is a sincere obedience. Perfect obedience consists in the exact conformity of our hearts and lives to the law of GOD, without the least imperfection, and without failing in any point or degree of our duty. And this obedience, as it is not consistent with the frailty and infirmity of corrupt nature, and the imperfection of our present state, so neither doth GOD require it of us as a necessary condition of eternal life. We are indeed commanded to be "perfect, as our FATHER "which is in heaven is perfect:" but we are not to understand this strictly and rigorously; for that is not only impossible to men in this present state of imperfection, but absolutely impossible to humane nature, for "men to be perfect as GOD is perfect:" but the plain meaning of this precept is, that we should imitate those divine perfections of goodness, and mercy, and patience, and purity, and endeavour to be as like GOD in all these as we can, and be still aspiring after a nearer resemblance of him, as may be evident to any one who considers the connexion and occasion of these words.

By a sincere obedience, I mean such a conformity of our lives and actions to the law of GOD, as to the general course and tenor of them, that we do not live in the habitual practice of any known sin, or in the customary neglect of any material or considerable part of our known duty; and that we be not wilfully and deliberately guilty of the single act of heinous and notorious sins, as I have formerly explained this matter more at large, in another discourse. And this obedience, even in the best of men, is mixt with great frailty and imperfection; but yet because it is the utmost that we can do in this state of

SERM. CXXII.

infirmity and imperfection, the terms of the gospel are so merciful and gracious, as that GOD is pleased for the sake of the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR, to accept this sincere, though imperfect obedience, and to reward it with eternal life. And this, I doubt not, after all the intricate disputes, and infinite controversies about this business, is the true and clear state of the matter.

And this sincere obedience which the gospel requires of us, as a condition of our happiness, though it be sometimes called by divines, evangelical perfection; yet it is but very improperly so called; for nothing is properly perfect to which any thing is wanting; and great defects and imperfections must needs be acknowledged in the obedience of the best and holiest men upon earth; and they who pretend to perfection in this life, do neither understand the law of GOD, nor themselves, but (as St. John says of such persons) "they deceive themselves, and the "truth is not in them;" and besides other imperfections, these two are evident in them, ignorance and pride.

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to this second particular, namely, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification for eternal life.

SERMON

SERMON CXXIII.

The possibility and necessity of gospel-obedience, and its consistence with free grace.

HEB. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

FOR the explication of these words, I propos'd to consider these five things. SERM. CXXIII.

1st, How and by what means CHRIST is the author of our salvation. The second sermon on this text,

2dly, What obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3dly, The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4thly, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

5thly, The consistency of this method and means of our salvation with the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of GOD declared in the gospel.

I have handled the two first of these, and now proceed to the

Third thing I proposed to consider, viz. the possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel. For if

CHRIST

SERM. CXXIII.

CHRIST be "the author of eternal salvation only "to those who obey him;" then those who live in disobedience to the gospel are in a state of damnation. But there cannot be the guilt of disobedience, where obedience is impossible; no man being guilty, or justly liable to punishment, for the not doing of that, which it was no ways possible for him to do. Therefore the covenant of the gospel, into which GOD is enter'd with mankind, doth necessarily suppose the possibility of performing the condition of it; otherwise it leaves them in as bad a condition as they were in before, because it only offers new blessings and benefits to us, but sets us never the nearer the obtaining of them, if so be the condition upon which they are granted be altogether impossible to us; nay, it renders our state many degrees worse, if our not performing the condition of such gracious offers brings us under new and greater guilt.

If it be said, that some persons have great benefit by it, because they by an especial and effectual grace shall be enabled to perform the conditions of this covenant; is not this a mighty straitning to the grace and mercy of the gospel, to confine it within so narrow a compass, as still to leave the greatest part of mankind in a worse condition, than if salvation had never been offer'd to them: as it certainly does, if (as this doctrine does necessarily suppose) the guilt and punishment of men shall be greatly increased and heightned by their contempt of, and disobedience to the gospel; when at the same time it is acknowledged, that it was not possible for those men to obey it; for want of that special and effectual grace, which is necessary to enable them thereto.

thereto. I do not love to handle these points contentiously, but this in my apprehension does as much derogate from the amplitude and riches of GOD's grace in the gospel, as any thing that can easily be said. SERM. CXXIII.

And therefore, for the right stating and clearing of this matter, I shall endeavour to make out these three things.

1. That we are not sufficient of our selves, and by any power in us, to perform the condition of the gospel.

2. That the grace of GOD is ready to enable and assist us to the performance of these conditions, if we be not wanting to our selves.

3. That what the grace of GOD is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves, that may properly be said to be possible to us, and, in some sense, in our power.

1. That we are not sufficient of our selves, and by any power in us, to perform the condition of the gospel. The grace of GOD doth clearly appear in the whole business of our salvation: "by grace ye "are saved (says the apostle) and that not of your "selves, it is the gift of GOD." Faith is the gift of GOD, and so is repentance. "It is GOD that "works in us both to will and to do of his own "goodness;" that is, who both inclines and excites us to that which is good, and enables us to do it. "Without me (says CHRIST) ye can do nothing." And "through CHRIST strengthning me" (saith St. Paul) "I am able to do all things;" all things which GOD requires of us, and expects to be done by us in order to our salvation. Without the grace of CHRIST, "we are without strength; and are "not

SERM CXXIII

" not sufficient of ourselves, as of ourselves, to think " a good thought;" that is, we are not sufficient of ourselves to design or resolve upon any thing that is good; " but our sufficiency is of GOD."

The depravation of our nature hath brought a great impotency and disability upon us to that which is good; and we have made ourselves much weaker by evil practice; by the power of evil habits, we are enslaved to our lusts, and " sold under sin." So that if at any time we are convinced of our duty, and from that conviction have an inclination to that which is good, " evil is present to us." When the law of GOD gives us the knowledge of our duty, and stares our consciences in the face, " there " is another law in our members, warring against the " law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity " to the law of sin, which is in our members." Sin brings us under the power of Satan, and gives him dominion over us. " For his servants ye are " whom ye obey;" so that he rules and bears sway in us, and " we are led captive by him at his plea- " sure." Evil and vicious habits are a kind of second nature superinduced upon us, which takes away our power and liberty to that which is good, and renders it impossible to us to raise and rescue our selves; so that " we are prisoners and captives, 'till " the SON of GOD sets us free; and dead in tres- " passes and sins,'till he gives us life." And therefore the prophet represents the recovery of ourselves from the bondage of sin, by such things as are naturally impossible, to shew how great our weakness and impotency is; Jer. xiii. 23. " Can the ethiopian change " his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye " also do good, who are accustomed to do evil."

And

And by how much stronger the chains of our sins are, and the more unable we are to break loose from them; by so much the greater and more evident is the necessity of the divine assistance, and of the power of GOD's grace, to knock off those fetters, and to rescue us from this bondage and slavery. SERM. CXXIII.

2. The grace of GOD is ready to assist and enable us to the performance of these conditions, that is, to faith and repentance, and all the purposes of obedience and a holy life; if we be not wanting to our selves, and do not reject or neglect to make use of that grace, which GOD offers us, and is ready to afford us in a very plentiful manner. And this is that which renders all the mercies of the gospel effectual (if it be not our own fault, and wilful neglect) to the great end and design of our salvation; and without this, all the gracious offers of the gospel would signify nothing at all to our advantage.

And this likewise is that which renders the unbelief and impenitency and disobedience of men utterly inexcusable; because nothing of all this does proceed from want of power, but of will to do better. And therefore this is so necessary an encouragement to all the endeavours of obedience and a good life, that men should be assured of GOD's readiness to assist and help them in the doing of their duty, that without this the revelation of the gospel, tho' never so clear, would signify nothing to us, all the precepts and directions for a good life, and the most vehement persuasions and exhortations to obedience, would have no force and life in them; for what signifies it to direct the dead, and speak to them that cannot hear, and to persuade men, tho' it were with

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all the earnestness in the world, to those things which it is impossible for them to do?

Therefore our blessed SAVIOUR, when he had laid down, and explained the precepts of holiness and virtue in his sermon upon the mount, to encourage them to what he had been directing and proposing to them, he assures them that GOD is ready to afford his grace and assistance to all those that are sincerely desirous to do his will, and do earnestly implore his grace and assistance to that purpose, Matth. vii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. "Ask (saith he) and it shall be "given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and "it shall be opened unto you: for every one that "asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; "and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." So that if any man want the grace and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, it is his own fault; it is either for want of seeking, or for want of earnestness in asking; for our SAVIOUR expressly assures us, that he denies it to none; "for every one that ask-"eth, receiveth."

And to give us a more lively and sensible assurance of this, he represents the care and kindness of GOD to men, by the affections of earthly parents to their children, who tho' they be many times evil themselves, yet are not wont to deny their children necessary good things, when they decently and dutifully beg them at their hands; "what man is there of you, whom "if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? "or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? "If ye then being evil, know how to give good "gifts unto your children, how much more shall your "FATHER which is in heaven, give good things to "them that ask him?" Here is a general promise

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SERM. CXXIII.

and declaration, that upon our humble and earnest prayer to GOD, he will grant us whatever is good and necessary, by which is certainly intended in the first place, spiritual good things, because these are the best and most necessary; and to satisfy us that our SAVIOUR did in the first place, and more especially mean these, St. Luke does particularly instance in the grace and assistance of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT. Luke xi. 13. "How much more shall your heavenly "FATHER give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that "ask him?" "the HOLY SPIRIT," that is, the continual presence and influence of it to all the purposes of guidance and direction, of grace and assistance, of comfort and support in our christian course.

And what else is the meaning of that parable of our SAVIOUR's concerning the talents intrusted with every man, according to his capacity and opportunities, Matth. xxv. I say, what else can be the meaning of it but this? that GOD is before-hand with every man, by affording the advantages and opportunities of being happy, and such a measure of grace and assistance to that end, which if he faithfully improve, he shall be admitted "into the joy of his "LORD."

And upon this consideration of the gracious promises of the gospel to this purpose, it is, that the apostle St. Paul doth so earnestly exhort christians to endeavour after the highest degree of universal holiness and purity, that we are capable of in this life; 2 Cor. vii. 1. "Having therefore these promises, "dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all "filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness "in the fear of GOD." And so likewise Phil. ii. 12, 13. "Wherefore, my beloved, work out your

SERM. CXXIII.

" own ſalvation with fear and trembling" (that is, with great care and concernment, leſt you ſhould fall ſhort of it) " for it is GOD that worketh in you " both to will and to do, of his good pleaſure." The conſideration of GOD's readineſs to aſſiſt us, and of his grace which is always at hand to ſtir up our wills to that which is good, and to ſtrengthen us in the doing of it, ought to be a great argument and encouragement to us, to put forth our utmoſt endeavours, and ſo co-operate with the grace of GOD toward our own ſalvation.

And the apoſtle St. Peter uſeth the ſame argument to preſs men to uſe their utmoſt " diligence, " to make their calling and election ſure," by abounding in all the virtues of a good life, 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. " According as his divine power hath given " us all things which pertain to life and godlineſs." (that is, hath ſo plentifully furniſh'd us with all the requiſites to a godly life) " through the knowledge " of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (that is, by knowledge of the goſpel and the grace therein offered to us) " whereby he hath given unto " us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by " theſe ye might be partakers of a divine nature, " having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world " through luſt." And then from the conſideration of this divine power, conveyed to us by the goſpel, and the promiſes of it, he exhorts men " to give all " diligence, to add to their faith, virtue, and know- " ledge, and temperance, and patience, and god- " lineſs, and brotherly love and charity."

And indeed the ſcripture every where aſcribes our regeneration and ſanctification, the beginning, and progreſs, and perſeverance of our obedience, to the powerful

powerful grace and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT; we are said to be "regenerated and born "again of the SPIRIT, to be renewed and "sanctified by the HOLY GHOST, to be led by "the SPIRIT, and by the SPIRIT to mortify "the deeds of the flesh," and in a word, "to be "kept by the mighty power of GOD through "faith unto salvation."

3. What the grace of GOD is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves, may properly be said to be possible to us, and in some sense, in our power. That may be said to be possible to us, which tho' we "cannot do of our selves "as of our selves," (that is by our own natural power) yet we can do by the help and assistance of another, if that assistance be ready to be afforded to us; as we are sure the grace of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT is, because he hath promised it to them that seek it, and "he is faithful who hath pro-"mised."

That cannot be said to be wholly out of any man's power, which he may have for asking; that which we are able to do by the strength and assistance of another, is not impossible to us. Surely St. Paul did no ways derogate from the grace of GOD when he said, "I am able to do all things "thro' CHRIST strengthening me;" he reckons himself able to do all that which by the strength of CHRIST he was enabled to do.

And this is the true ground of all the persuasions and exhortations, which we meet with in scripture, to holiness and obedience, which would all be, not only to no purpose, but very unreasonable, if we were wholly destitute of power to do what GOD commands:

SERM. CXXIII.

commands: but if he be always ready at hand to assist us by a grace sufficient for us, if he co-operate with us in the work of our salvation, then is there abundant ground of encouragement to our endeavours; and if we fall short of eternal salvation, it is wholly our own fault; it is not because GOD is wanting to us in those aids and assistances of his grace which are necessary; but because we are wanting to our selves, in not seeking GOD's grace more earnestly, or by neglecting to make use of it when it is afforded to us. For it is really all one, both to the encouragement of our endeavours, and to the rendring of our disobedience inexcusable, whether we be able of our selves to perform the condition of the gospel, or GOD be ready to assist us by his grace and HOLY SPIRIT to that purpose.

Wherefore, as the apostle exhorts, Heb. xii. 12, 13, 14, 15. "Lift up the hands which hang down, "and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for "your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out "of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow "holiness, without which no man shall see the "LORD; looking diligently lest any man fail of "the grace of GOD;" intimating, that it is want of care and diligence on our part, if the grace of GOD fail of its end, and be not effectual to all the purposes of faith, and repentance, and obedience. GOD does not withhold his grace from us: but men may receive it in vain, if they do not make use of it. And thus I have done with the third thing I proposed to consider from these words. I proceed to the

Fourth,

Fourth, viz. to consider the necessity of this obedience, in order to our obtaining of eternal life and happiness. "CHRIST is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;" that is, to such, and only to such, as live in obedience to the precepts of his holy gospel, to them who frame the general course of their lives according to his laws. Some men seem to be so afraid of the merit of obedience and good works, that they are loth to assert the necessity of them, and do it with so much caution, as if they were not throughly persuaded of it, or did apprehend some dangerous consequences of it: but this fear is perfectly groundless; as if merit could not be excluded, without casting off our duty, and releasing our selves from any necessary obligation to be good. For any man surely may easily discern a plain difference between a worthiness of desert, and a fitness of receiving a rebel, being penitent and sorry for what he hath done; though he cannot deserve a pardon, yet he may thereby be qualified and made meet to receive it; though repentance do not make him worthy, yet it may make him capable of it, which an obstinate rebel, and one that persists in his disloyalty, is not. This is a thing so plain of it self, that it would be waste of time and words to insist longer upon the proof of it. SERM. CXXIII.

Now the necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness, relies upon these three grounds.

1st, upon the constitution and appointment of GOD.

2dly, the general reason of rewards.

3dly, upon the particular nature of that reward, which GOD will confer upon us for our obedience.

1st, the

SERM. CXXIII.

1st, the constitution and appointment of God. "Eternal life is the gift of God;" and he may do what he will with his own, he may dispense his gifts and favours upon what terms and conditions he pleaseth; and therefore if he hath plainly declared, that "to them who by patient continu-"ance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, "and immortality, he will give eternal life;" that "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;" but "if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end "shall be everlasting life;" who shall resist his will, or dispute his pleasure? The right and authority of God in this matter is so unquestionable, that it admits of no contest; and the blessings and benefits propos'd, are so infinitely great and invaluable, that no condition of obtaining them, which is possible to be perform'd by us, can be thought hard and unequal; so that we ought thankfully to receive so great a favour, let the terms and conditions of it be what they will; and if there were no other reason for the imposing of these conditions upon us, of faith, and repentance, and obedience, but meerly the will and pleasure of God, this were enough to silence all objections against it.

But 2dly, the necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life, is likewise founded in the reason of rewards in general. For though the measure and degree of our reward so infinitely beyond the proportion of our best duty and service, as eternal life and happiness is, I say, though the measure and degree of this reward be founded in the immense bounty and goodness of God; yet the reason of reward in general, is necessarily founded in our obedience to God's laws; for according to the true nature

SERM. CXXIII.

nature and reason of things, nothing but obedience is capable of reward. For though authority may pardon the breach and transgressions of laws, and remit the punishment due thereto, yet to reward the contempt of laws, and wilful disobedience to them, is directly contrary to the design of government, and does plainly overthrow the very reason and end of all laws, and makes obedience and disobedience to be all one, if so be they are equally capable of reward: and therefore nothing can be more absurd and senseless, than for any man to hope to be rewarded by GOD, who does not live in a sincere obedience to his laws. "Every man that hath this hope in him," (that is, in CHRIST JESUS, to be saved by him) "purifieth himself, even as he is pure;" that is, endeavours to be like him in the purity and obedience of his life: and nothing surely can be more unreasonable than to expect to be rewarded by the great governor and judge of the world, if we be disobedient to his laws; for where obedience to law is refused, there all reason and equity and reward ceaseth. No wise prince can think fit to reward disloyalty and contempt of his laws; because to reward it, would be to encourage it; much less will GOD, the great and infinitely wise governor of the world.

3dly, the necessity of obedience will yet more evidently appear, if we consider the particular nature of that reward, which GOD will confer upon us for our obedience. The happiness of heaven, which is the reward promised in the gospel, is described to us by the sight and enjoyment of GOD. Now to render us capable of this blessed reward, it is necessary that we be like GOD; but nothing but obe-

SERM. CXXIII.

obedience and holiness, and "being renewed after "the image of him who created us in righteous-"ness" can make us like to GOD. For he that would be like GOD must be holy, and just, and good, and patient, and merciful, as GOD is; and this alone can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of GOD; for unless "we be like him, we can-"not see him as he is," and if we should be admitted into heaven, we could not find any pleasure and happiness in communion with him. "Blessed are "the pure in heart (says our SAVIOUR) for they "shall see GOD." "Without holiness (says the "apostle) no man shall see the LORD." And indeed it is in the very nature of the thing impossible, that a wicked man (whilst he remains so) should ever be happy, because there can be no agreeable and delightful society between those that are of a quite contrary temper and disposition to one another, between him "who is of purer eyes than to behold "iniquity," and a sinful and impure creature. For "what fellowship (saith the apostle) can righteous-"ness have with unrighteousness? what communion "hath light with darkness, or GOD with belial?" that is, with the wicked and disobedient. 'Till we become like to GOD in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy society between him and us; we could neither delight ourselves in GOD, nor he take any pleasure in us; for "he is "not a GOD that hath pleasure in wickedness, nei-"ther shall evil dwell with him. The wicked shall "not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers "of iniquity." It cannot be otherwise, but that there must be an eternal jarring and discord between the righteous, and holy GOD, and wicked and unrighte-

unrighteous men. "I will behold thy face (says "David) in righteousness." There is no looking GOD in the face, upon any other terms. If we have been "workers of iniquity," GOD will cast us out of his sight, and in great anger bid us to "depart "from him;" and we also shall desire him to "de- "part from us," being unable to bear the sight of him.

So that there is great reason why holiness and obedience should be made the conditions of eternal life and happiness, since in the very nature of the thing it is so necessary a qualification for the blessed sight and enjoyment of GOD, who to us is the cause and fountain of happiness. I come in the

Fifth and last place, to shew that this method and means of our salvation is no prejudice to the law of faith, and to the free grace and mercy of GOD declared in the gospel. The gospel is called "the "law of faith, and the law of grace," in opposition to the Jewish dispensation, which is called "the "law, or covenant of works," because it consisteth so much in external rites and observances, which were but "types and shadows of good things to come," (as the apostle calls them in this epistle,) and which when they were come, that law did expire of itself, and was out of date, the obligation and observance of it was no longer necessary; but "a better cove- "nant, which was established upon better promises," came in the place of it, and men were "justified "by faith," that is, by sincerely embracing the christian religion, and were no longer under an obligation to that external, and servile, and imperfect dispensation, which consisted in circumcision, and in almost an endless number of external ceremonies.

Theſe are the works of the law ſo often ſpoken of by St. Paul, concerning which the Jews had not only an opinion of the neceſſity of them to a man's juſtification and ſalvation, but likewiſe of the merit of them; in oppoſition to both which opinions, St. Paul calls the covenant of the goſpel, "the law of "faith, and the law of grace."

But there is no where the leaſt intimation given, either by our SAVIOUR or his apoſtles, that obedience to the precepts of the goſpel (which are in ſubſtance the moral law cleared and perfected) is not neceſſary to our acceptance with GOD, and the obtaining of eternal life; but on the contrary, 'tis our SAVIOUR's expreſs direction to the young man, who ask'd "what good things he ſhould do, that he "might obtain eternal life; if thou wilt (ſays he) "enter into life, keep the commandments;" and that he might underſtand what commandments he meant, he inſtanceth in the precepts of the moral law. And indeed, the whole tenor of our SAVIOUR's ſermons, and the precepts and writings of the apoſtles, are full and expreſs to this purpoſe. "Not every "one that ſaith unto me, LORD, LORD, ſhall en- "ter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth "the will of my FATHER which is in heaven. "Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine (that is, "theſe precepts which I have delivered) and doth "them not, I will liken him to a fooliſh man, "who built his houſe upon the ſand, and the rain "deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds "blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and "great was the fall of it. If ye know theſe things, "happy are ye, if ye do them. In every nation, "he that feareth GOD, and worketh righteouſneſs,

"is

" is accepted of him. In JESUS CHRIST neither " circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumci- " sion; but faith, that is acted and inspired by cha- " rity." And that the apostle here means " that " charity or love," which is, " the fulfilling of the " law," is evident from what he says elsewhere; " that neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor " uncircumcision; but the keeping of the command- " ments of GOD;" in which text it is plain, that the apostle speaks of the terms of our justification, and what is available with GOD to that purpose. And St. James to the same purpose, tells us, that by the works of obedience " our faith is made " perfect," and that " faith without works is dead;" and surely a dead faith will neither justify nor save any man. St. John likewise very earnestly cautions us to take heed of any such doctrine, as would take away the necessity of righteousness and obedience; " little children (says he) let no man deceive you, " he that doth righteousness is righteous, as he is " righteous." To all which I shall only add the plain words of my text, " that CHRIST became " the author of eternal salvation to them that obey " him." SERM. CXXIII.

So that no man hath reason to fear, that this doctrine of the necessity of obedience to our acceptance with GOD, and the obtaining of eternal life, should be any ways prejudicial to the law of faith, and the law of grace. For so long as these three things are but asserted and secured:

1st, That faith is the root and principle of obedience and a holy life, and that " without it, it is " impossible to please GOD."

2dly, That

SERM. CXXIII

2dly, That we stand continually in need of the divine grace and assistance to enable us to perform that obedience which the gospel requires of us, and is pleased to accept in order to eternal life. And,

3dly, That the forgiveness of our sins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of GOD, conferring these blessings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and satisfaction of the obedience and sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR and REDEEMER; I say, so long as we assert these three things, we give all that the gospel any where ascribes to faith, and to the grace of GOD revealed in the gospel.

I have been careful to express these things more fully and distinctly, that no man may imagine, that whilst we assert the necessity of obedience and a holy life, we have any design to derogate in the least from the faith and the grace of GOD; but only to engage and encourage men to holiness and a good life, by convincing them of the absolute and indispensable necessity of it, in order to eternal salvation. For all that I have said, is in plain english no more but this, that it is necessary for a man to be a good man, that he may get to heaven; and whoever finds fault with this doctrine, finds fault with the gospel it self, and the main end and design of the grace of GOD therein revealed to mankind, which offers salvation to men upon no other terms than these which I have mentioned; and to preach and press this doctrine, is certainly, if any thing in the world can be so, to pursue the great end and design of the christian religion, so plainly and expressly declared by St. Paul, Tit. ii. 11, 12. "The grace of

"GOD

SERM. CXXIII.

" GOD that bringeth salvation, hath appear'd " to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness " and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righte- " ously, and godly in this present world." And if the grace of GOD declared in the gospel have this effect upon us, then we may with confidence " wait " for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance " of the great GOD, and our SAVIOUR JESUS " CHRIST, who gave himself for us, that he " might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to " himself a peculiar people zealous of good works;" and then he adds, " these things teach and exhort, " and rebuke with all authority;" that is, declare and inculcate this doctrine, and rebuke severely those who teach or practise contrary to it. And he repeats it again with a more vehement charge to Titus, to press upon men the necessity of obedience and good works, chap. iii. 8. " This is a faithful saying, and " these things I will that thou affirm constantly, " that they who have believed in GOD, be careful " to maintain good works."

All that now remains, is to make some useful inferences from what hath been said upon this argument, and so to conclude this discourse.

First of all, to convince us that an empty profession of the christian religion, how specious and glorious soever it be, if it be destitute of the fruits of obedience and a holy life, will by no means avail to bring us to heaven. No profession of faith in CHRIST, no subjection to him, tho' we be baptized in his name, and list our selves in the number of his disciples and followers, tho' we have made a constant profession of all the articles of the christian faith,

SERM. CXXIII.

faith, and have performed all the external parts and duties of religion, have gone constantly to church, and frequented the service of GOD, and have joined in publick prayers to GOD with great appearance of devotion, and have heard his word with great reverence and attention, and received the blessed sacrament with all imaginable expressions of love and gratitude to our blessed REDEEMER; nay tho' we had heard our blessed SAVIOUR himself "teach in "our streets, and had eaten and drunken in his "presence;" yet if all this while "we have not "done the will of GOD," and obeyed his laws, none of all these things will signify any thing to bring us to heaven, and make us partakers of that salvation, which he hath purchased for mankind.

But we cannot plead so much for our selves, as those did, of whom our SAVIOUR speaks. None of us shall be able to alledge for our selves at the great day, that "we had propheſied in his name, "and in his name had cast out devils, and in his "name had done many wonderful works;" and yet if we could alledge all this, it would do us no good. All that such can say for themselves is, that "they "have call'd him LORD, LORD," that is, they have made profession of his religion, and been call'd by his name, that they have paid an outward honour and respect to him, and declared a mighty love and affection for him; but "they have not done his "will, but have hated to be reformed, and have "cast his commandments behind their backs" they have only born the leaves of an outward profession, but "have brought forth no fruit unto holiness," and therefore can have no reasonable expectation, that "their end should be everlasting life." So that

when

when these men shall appear before the great and terrible judge of the world, they shall have nothing to say, but those vain words, "LORD, LORD:" to which our SAVIOUR will answer in that day, "why call ye me, LORD, LORD, when ye "would not do the things which I said?" notwithstanding all your profession of faith in me, and subjection to me, "ye have been workers of iniquity, "therefore depart from me, I know ye not whence "ye are." SERM. CXXIII.

Secondly, the consideration of what hath been said should stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of what the author of our salvation hath done for us; and there is great reason for thankfulness, whether we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, or the way and manner in which it was purchased, or the easy and reasonable terms upon which it may be obtain'd.

1st, if we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, and that is salvation, "eternal "salvation," which comprehends in it all the blessings and benefits of the gospel, both the means and the end, our happiness, and the way to it, by "saving us from our sins;" from the guilt of them, by our justification in the blood of CHRIST; and from the power and dominion of them, by the sanctifying grace and virtue of the HOLY GHOST.

And it comprehends the end, our deliverance from hell and the wrath to come, and the bestowing of happiness upon us, a great and lasting happiness, great as our wishes, and immortal as our souls; all this is comprehended in "eternal sal-"vation."

SERM. CXXIII.

2dly, If we consider the way and manner in which this great benefit was purchased and procured for us; in a way of infinite kindness and condescension, in the lowest humiliation, and the unparallel'd sufferings of the SON of GOD; for "never was "there any sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith "the LORD afflicted him in the day of his fierce "anger;" in his "taking upon him the form of a "servant;" and the person of a sinner, and his "becoming obedient to death, even the death of the "cross," which was the punishment of the vilest slaves, and the most heinous malefactors. The SON of GOD came down from heaven, from the highest pitch of glory and happiness, into this lower world, this "vale of tears," and sink of sin and sorrow; and was contented himself to suffer, to save us from eternal ruin; to be the most despicable, and the most miserable man that ever was, that he might raise us to glory and honour, and advance us to a state of the greatest happiness that humane nature is capable of.

3dly, If we consider the easy and reasonable terms upon which we may be made partakers of this unspeakable benefit, and that is by a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the laws of GOD, which supposeth repentance towards GOD, and faith in our LORD JESUS CHRIST, as the root and principle of all the virtues of a good life; that is, by doing that which best becomes us, and which is most agreeable to the original frame of our nature and to the dictates of our reason, and which setting aside the consideration of our reward, is really best for our present benefit and advantage, our comfort and happiness, even in this world; for GOD, in giving

giving laws to us, hath imposed nothing upon us, but what in all reason ought to have been our choice, if he had not imposed it; nothing but what is for our good, and is in its own nature necessary to make us capable of that happiness which he hath promised to us. And what can be more gracious, than to make one benefit the condition of a greater? than to promise to make us happy for ever, if we will but do that which upon all accounts is really best and most for our advantage in this present life?

Thirdly, here is abundant encouragement given to our obedience; we have the divine assistance promised to us, to enable us to the performance of the most difficult parts of our duty; we have the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD to help our infirmities, to excite us to that which is good, and to help and strengthen us in the doing of it.

For our further encouragement we are assured of the divine acceptance in case of our sincere obedience, notwithstanding the manifold failings and imperfections of it, for the sake of the perfect righteousness and obedience, and the meritorious sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR: and tho' "when we "have done all we can do, we are unprofitable "servants," and have done nothing but what was our duty, yet GOD is pleased to accept what we can do, because it is sincere, and to forgive the defects and imperfections of our obedience, for his sake, who "fulfilled all righteousness."

And besides all this, we have the encouragement of a great and everlasting reward, infinitely beyond all proportion of any service and obedience that we can perform. And if GOD be ready to assist and strengthen us in the doing of our duty, and be willing

SERM. CXXIII.

so graciously to accept and to reward at such a rate the sincerity of our endeavours to please him, notwithstanding all the failings and imperfections of our best service and obedience; what can we possibly desire more for our encouragement, to "patient continuance in well-doing," and to be "stedfast "and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the "LORD?"

Fourthly and lastly, the consideration of what hath been said upon this argument may serve severely to rebuke the groundless presumption of those, who rely with so much confidence upon CHRIST for eternal salvation, without any conscience or care to keep his commandments; as if salvation lay upon his hands, and he knew not how to dispose of it, and were glad of any one that would come and take it off upon any terms. No, "he came to save us "from our sins, to redeem us from all iniquity, and "to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of "good works."

So that the salvation which he hath purchased for us, doth necessarily imply our forsaking of our sins, and returning to GOD and our duty; and his death and sufferings are not more an argument of his great love to mankind, than they are a demonstration of his perfect hatred of sin. So that if we continue in the love and practice of sin, we defeat the whole design of his coming into the world, and of all that he hath done and suffered for us; and the redemption which CHRIST hath wrought for us will not avail us in the least. "Salvation is far from the "wicked," (says David, Psal. cxix. 155.) If we have been "workers of iniquity," the SAVIOUR of the world when he comes to judge it, will bid us "to de-"part from him."

From

From all that hath been ſaid, it is evident, that it is the greateſt preſumption in the world for any man to hope to obtain eternal ſalvation by any device whatſoever, or in the communion of any church whatſoever, without obedience and a holy life. For tho' our obedience cannot merit; yet it is neceſſary to qualify and diſpoſe us for it: tho' it does not make us ſtrictly worthy; yet it makes us "meet "to be made partakers of the inheritance of the "ſaints in light."

SERMON CXXIV.

The authority of JESUS CHRIST, with the commiſſion and promiſe which he gave to his apoſtles.

MATTH. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

And JESUS *came and ſpake unto them, ſaying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the* FATHER, *and of the* SON, *and of the* HOLY GHOST: *teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*

THESE words are the laſt that our bleſſed SERM. SAVIOUR ſpake to his apoſtles, immediate- CXXIV. ly before his aſcenſion into heaven; and there are theſe three things contained in them.

I. A

SERM. CXXIV.

I. A declaration of his own authority; "all "power is given unto me both in heaven and in "earth."

II. A commiſſion to his diſciples grounded upon that authority; "go ye therefore and teach all na- "tions, baptizing them in the name of the FA- "THER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY "GHOST: teaching them to obſerve all things "whatſoever I have commanded you."

III. A promiſe to encourage them in this work; "and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end "of the world."

I. Here's our SAVIOUR's declaration of his own authority; "all power is given unto me in heaven "and earth." Here's an unlimited power and authority given him over all creatures in heaven and earth. This the ſcripture tells us was conferred upon him, as a reward of his ſufferings, Philip. ii. 8, 9, 10. "He humbled himſelf, and became obedient "unto death, even the death of the croſs. Where- "fore GOD alſo hath highly exalted him, and given "him a name, which is above every name; that "at the name of JESUS every knee ſhould bow, of "things in heaven, and things in earth, and things "under the earth;" that is, that all creatures, angels, and men, and devils, ſhould do homage, and acknowledge ſubjection to him.

II. Here is the commiſſion he gave to his apoſtles, by virtue of this authority; "go ye therefore and "teach all nations." The commiſſion which he here gives, is founded in the authority he had before received. Having all power committed to him, he conſtitutes and appoints the apoſtles and their ſucceſſors to manage the affairs of this his ſpi-

ritual

SERM. CXXIV.

ritual kingdom upon earth; and this ſeems to be the ſame commiſſion which St. John mentions in other words, John xx. 21. "As my FATHER hath "ſent me, even ſo ſend I you;" that is, as my FATHER commiſſion'd me before, ſo now having received full authority from him, I commiſſion you.

Now in this commiſſion, which our SAVIOUR gave to his diſciples, I ſhall take notice,

Firſt, of the general import and deſign of it.

Secondly, a more particular declaration how they were to manage this deſign.

Firſt, the general import and deſign of this commiſſion; "go ye and teach all nations." The word which we tranſlate teach, is μαθητεύσατε, diſciple all nations, endeavour to make all the world chriſtians. One would think here was a power plainly enough given them, to preach the goſpel to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. Which will more fully appear, if we compare this paſſage in St. Matthew with the other evangeliſts. St. Mark, chap. xvi. 15. hath it; "go ye into all the world, and preach the "goſpel to every creature." From which text I ſuppoſe St. Francis thought himſelf bound to preach to beaſts and birds, and accordingly did it very often, and with wonderful ſucceſs as they tell us in the legend of his life. But to extend our SAVIOUR's commiſſion ſo far, is want of common ſenſe; in which St. Francis (tho' they tell us he had other gifts and graces to an eminent degree) was plainly defective.

But to proceed, St. Luke chap. xxiv. 47. tells us, our SAVIOUR commanded, that "repentance and "remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in his name "among all nations, beginning at Jeruſalem." So that

SERM. CXXIV.

that their commiſſion did plainly extend to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; only they were to begin with the Jews, and to preach the goſpel firſt to them, and when they had gone over Judea and Samaria, then to paſs to other nations, as St. Luke doth moſt expreſly declare, Acts i. 8. "Ye ſhall receive power, after that the HOLY GHOST is "come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto "me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judea, and "in Samaria, unto the uttermoſt parts of the "earth."

But ſee the ſtrange power of prejudice, to blind the eyes even of good men, in the plaineſt matters. The diſciples of our SAVIOUR, for all they had entertained a new religion, yet they retained the old pride and prejudice of their nation, againſt the reſt of the world; as if none but themſelves had any ſhare in the favour of GOD, or were to have any part in the ſalvation of the MESSIAS.

Our SAVIOUR did ſo far conſider this prejudice of theirs, that he never in his life-time acquainted them with this matter, ſo as to make them fully to underſtand it, becauſe they were not able to bear it. And it is very probable, that this is one of thoſe things which our SAVIOUR meant, John xvi. 12, 13. "I have yet many things to ſay unto "you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit "when the SPIRIT of truth is come, he will "guide you into all truth." That is, he ſhould lead them into the knowledge of thoſe truths, of which they were not then capable. And tho' our SAVIOUR, after his reſurrection, ſeems to have declared this ſufficiently to them; yet by their practice after his aſcenſion, it appears that they underſtood all this

this only of the Jews, namely that they were to preach the goſpel firſt to the Jews that were at Jeruſalem, and in Judea, and then to thoſe that were diſperſed in other nations; for 'tis clear from the hiſtory of their firſt preaching, recorded in the Acts, that they preached to none but to the Jews, and the proſelytes of the jewiſh religion. So ſtrong was their prejudice, that they had not the leaſt ſuſpicion that this bleſſing of the goſpel was intended for the heathen world; nor were they convinced to the contrary 'till St. Peter had a ſpecial viſion and revelation to this purpoſe, and the HOLY GHOST came upon the Gentiles in miraculous gifts, as he had done before upon the Jews that were converted to chriſtianity. And thus the SPIRIT of GOD "led them into this truth," and then they underſtood this command of our SAVIOUR's in a larger ſenſe. And to this St. Peter plainly refers, Acts x. 42. where he tells us, how that CHRIST after his reſurrection appeared to them, and "commanded them to preach unto the people." So likewiſe do Paul and Barnabas, Acts xiii. 46. where they ſpeak thus to the Jews, "it was neceſſary that "the word ſhould firſt be preached to you, but "ſeeing you put it from you, lo we turn to the "Gentiles, for ſo hath the LORD commanded us." Now he no where commanded this, but in this commiſſion, which he gave them before his aſcenſion.

Secondly, you have here a particular declaration how they were to manage this work of making diſciples to the chriſtian religion.

1. By baptizing them into the chriſtian faith.

2. By inſtructing them in the precepts and practices of a chriſtian life.

SERM. CXXIV.

1. By baptizing them into the christian faith, which is here called "baptizing them in the "name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of "the HOLY GHOST." Baptism is a solemn rite appointed by our SAVIOUR for the initiating persons into the christian religion: but it was a ceremony in use before, both among the Jews and Gentiles. The heathens observed it at the initiating persons into their religious mysteries; and the Jews, when they admitted proselytes to their religion; at which time the males (as Maimonides tells us) were both circumcised and baptized, the women were only baptized. One circumstance of the baptism of grown persons was, that standing in the water up to the neck, they received several precepts of the law. And as the jewish writers further tell us, this ceremony did not only belong to them that were of grown years, but to the children of the proselytes, if it were desired, upon condition, that when they came to years they should continue in that religion.

Now tho' this was a religious ceremony used both by Jews and Gentiles, and without any divine institution, that we know of, our blessed SAVIOUR (who in none of his institutions seems to have favour'd unnecessary innovations) was so far from the superstition of declining it upon this account, tho' it had been in religious use both among Jews and Gentiles, that he seems the rather to have chosen it for that very reason. For seeing it was a common rite of all religions, and in it self very significant of that purity which is the great design of all religions, it was the more likely to find the easier acceptance, and to be most suitable to that, which

which he intended to be the univerſal religion of the world. SERM. CXXIV.

As for the form of baptiſm, "in the name of "the FATHER, of the SON, and of the HOLY "GHOST," it plainly refers to that ſhort creed, or profeſſion of faith, which was required of thoſe that were to be baptized, anſwerably to the reciting of the precepts of the law, at the baptizing of proſelytes among the Jews; now the articles of this creed were reduced to theſe three heads, "of the FA-"THER, SON, and HOLY GHOST," and contains what was neceſſary to be believed concerning each of theſe. And this probably is that which the apoſtle calls the doctrine of baptiſm, Heb. vi. 2. viz. a ſhort ſummary of the chriſtian faith, the profeſſion whereof was to be made at baptiſm; of which the moſt ancient fathers make ſo frequent mention, calling it "the rule of faith." It was a great while indeed before chriſtians tied themſelves ſtrictly to that very form of words, which we now call the apoſtles creed, but the ſenſe was the ſame, tho' every one expreſt it in his own words; nay the ſame father reciting it upon ſeveral occaſions, does not confine himſelf to the very ſame expreſſions: a plain indication that they were not then ſtrictly bound up to any form of words, but retaining the ſenſe and ſubſtance of the articles, every one expreſt them as he pleaſed. So that "to baptize in the "name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of "HOLY GHOST," is to perform this rite or ſacrament by the authority of, and with ſpecial relation to the three perſons of the bleſſed trinity, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, as the chief objects of the chriſtian faith, whereof ſolemn pro-

SERM. CXXIV.

session was then made. So that upon this form of baptism appointed by our SAVIOUR, compared with what is elsewhere said in scripture, concerning the divinity of the SON, and the HOLY GHOST, is principally founded the doctrine of the blessed trinity, I mean in that simplicity in which the scripture hath delivered it, and not as it hath been since confounded and entangled in the cobwebs and niceties of the schools. The scripture indeed no where calls them persons, but speaks of them as we do of several persons, and therefore that word is not unfitly used to express the difference between them, or at least we do not know a fitter word for that purpose.

By "baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST," is meant, the initiating of men by this solemn rite and ceremony into the christian religion, upon their profession of the necessary doctrines of it concerning the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, and a solemn stipulation and engagement to live according to those doctrines: which promise of a suitable life and practice was likewise made at the same time, as Justin Martyr and other of the ancient fathers do testify.

But before I leave this head, it is very fit to take particular notice what use the anabaptists make of this text, so as in effect to lay the whole stress of their cause upon it; as if by virtue of this command of our SAVIOUR's, and the manner wherein it is express'd, all infants, even those of christian parents, who are themselves already admitted into the new covenant of the gospe, were excluded from baptism, because it is here said by our SAVIOUR, "go

" go ye, and diſciple all nations, baptizing them;" from whence they infer, (and very clearly and ſtrongly as they think) that none are to be baptized, but ſuch as are firſt throughly inſtructed in the chriſtian religion, and made diſciples, which infants are not, but only thoſe who are grown to ſome maturity of years and underſtanding: but the opinion and practice of the ancient church in this matter, is a ſufficient bar to this inference, at leaſt to the clearneſs of it. And indeed it cannot reaſonably be imagined, that the apoſtles, who had all of them been bred up in the jewiſh religion, which conſtantly, and by virtue of a divine precept and inſtitution, admitted infants into that church, and to the benefits of that covenant, by the rite of circumciſion, and likewiſe the infants of proſelytes by baptiſm, (as I obſerved before) I ſay no man can reaſonably imagine, that the apoſtles could underſtand our SAVIOUR, as intending by any conſequence from this text, to exclude the children of chriſtians out of the chriſtian church, and to debar them of the benefits of the new covenant of the goſpel: the children of chriſtians being every whit as capable of being taken into this new covenant; and of partaking of the benefits of it, as children of the Jews were of being admitted into the old. Unleſs we will ſuppoſe (which at firſt ſight ſeems very harſh and unreaſonable) that by the terms of the chriſtian religion, children are in a much worſe condition, than the children of the Jews were under the law. So that the parity of reaſon being ſo plain, nothing leſs than an expreſs prohibition from our SAVIOUR, and an exception of children from baptiſm, can be thought, ſufficient to deprive the children of chriſtians

SERM. CXXIV.

ſtians of any privilege, of which the jewiſh were capable. For the plain meaning of this commiſſion to the apoſtles is, to go and "proſelyte all nations "to the chriſtian religion," and to admit them ſolemnly into it by baptiſm, as the Jews were wont to proſelyte men to their religion by circumciſion and baptiſm; by which rites alſo they took in the children of the proſelytes, upon promiſe that when they came to years they ſhould continue in that religion. And if this was our SAVIOUR's meaning, the apoſtles had no reaſon from the tenor of their commiſſion, to underſtand that the children of chriſtian proſelytes were any more excluded, than the children of proſelytes to the jewiſh religion, unleſs our SAVIOUR had expreſly excepted them; for it is a favourable caſe, and in a matter of privilege, and therefore ought not to be determined to debar children of it, upon any obſcure conſequence from a text, which it is certain was never ſo underſtood by the chriſtian church, for 1500 years together. I have done with the firſt part of their commiſſion, which was to diſciple or proſelyte all nations to the chriſtian religion, and to admit them into the chriſtian church, by the rite or ſacrament of baptiſm. I proceed to conſider the

Second part of their commiſſion, which was to inſtruct men in the precepts and duties of a chriſtian life, "teaching them to obſerve all things "whatſoever I have commanded you." You ſee how their commiſſion bounds and limits them, they were to teach others thoſe precepts which CHRIST had taught and deliver'd to them; they had no power by virtue of this commiſſion to make new laws, which ſhould be of univerſal and perpetual obligation,

gation, and consequently necessary to the salvation of all christians; they were only to be the publishers, but not the authors of this new religion. And therefore St. Paul, when the Corinthians consulted him about several things relating to marriage and virginity, he only gives his advice, but would not take upon him to make a law in those cases that should be binding to all christians. And for the same reason christians do generally at this day, think themselves absolved from the obligation of that canon, which was made even in a council of the apostles, as to all those branches of it, the reason whereof is now ceased. But notwithstanding this, the authority which our SAVIOUR conferred upon his apostles to teach his doctrine, does in the nature of it necessarily imply a power of governing the societies of christians, under such officers, and by such rules, as are most suitable to the nature of such a society, and most fit to promote the great ends of the christian religion: for without this power of governing, they cannot be suppos'd to be endowed with sufficient authority to teach; and therefore in pursuance of this commission, we find that the apostles did govern the societies of christians by such rules and constitutions, as were fitted to the present circumstances of christianity. And as they did appoint temporary officers upon emergent occasions, so they constituted others that were of perpetual use in the church, for the instructing and governing of christians, and that in such a subordination to one another, as would be most effectual to the attaining of the end of government; which subordination of governors, hath not only been used in all religions, but in all the well-regulated civil societies SERM. CXXIV.

SERM. CXXIV.

ties that ever were in the world. And this may suffice to have spoken of the second part of their commission.

The third and last thing in the text, is the promise which our SAVIOUR here makes for the encouragement of the apostles in this work; "lo, I "am with you always, even unto the end of the "world;" that is, tho' I be going from you in person, yet I will still be present with you by my power and SPIRIT. And surely this must needs be a great encouragement to have him engaged for their assistance, "who had all power in heaven and "earth committed to him," as he tells them at the 18th verse.

I shall endeavour therefore, as far as the time will permit, to explain to you the true meaning and extent of this promise. That it is primarily made to the apostles, no man can doubt, that considers that it was spoken to them immediately by our SAVIOUR; and in regard to them, the meaning of it is plainly this, that our SAVIOUR would send down the HOLY GHOST upon them, in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the more speedy planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them, and assist them extraordinarily in this work.

And that this is the primary meaning of it, in regard to the apostles, will be very plain, by considering how this promise is expres'd by the other evangelists; Mark xvi. 17. instead of this promise, you have these words, immediately after our SAVIOUR had given them commission to go and preach the gospel, "go ye into all the world, and preach the gos-"pel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized

" baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth SERM. CXXIV.
" not, shall be damned." And then it follows, " these signs shall follow them that believe; in " my name they shall cast out devils, and shall " speak with new tongues." And Luke xxiv. 49. instead of " lo, I am with you," it is said, " be- " hold, I send the promise of my FATHER upon " you," that is, the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST; for it follows in the next words, " but " tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be " endowed with power from on high." This St. Luke himself interprets of the promise of the HOLY GHOST, Acts i. 4, 5. " He commanded " them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, " but wait for the promise of the FATHER, which, " saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly " baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized " with the HOLY GHOST, not many days hence." And ver. 8. " Ye shall receive power after that the " HOLY GHOST is come upon you, and ye " shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, " and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the ut- " termost part of the earth." So that no man that compares these texts together, can doubt, but that this was the primary meaning of this promise, as it was made to the apostles.

But then it is as plain likewise, that this promise is to be extended farther than to the persons of the apostles, even to all those that should afterwards succeed them in this work of preaching the gospel, and baptizing, because our SAVIOUR adds, that " he would be with them to the end of the world;" which words, because they reach far beyond the apostles times, (as I shall shew by and by) must be

SERM. CXXIV. necessarily extended to such persons in after-ages, as should carry on the same work.

There are two famous controversies about the sense of these words, in which this promise is expressed.

The first is, concerning the circumstance of time mentioned in this promise, "alway, to the end of "the world."

The other concerning the substance of the promise itself, what is meant by our SAVIOUR's "being "with them." In the first we have to deal with the enthusiasts, in the latter with the papists. I shall examine the pretences of both these, as briefly and plainly as I can.

First, concerning the circumstance of time expressed in these words, "alway, to the end of the world." The enthusiasts would persuade us, that the meaning of these phrases is not to be extended beyond that age, and that this promise is to be limited to the apostles persons, and that the sense of it is, that CHRIST would be with the apostles, πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, all their days so long as they should live, and that would be, ἕως τ῀ συντελείας τ῀ αἰῶνος, to the end of that age; thus they translate it, and with no worse design than to take away the necessity of a gospel-ministry.

But this pretence will vanish, if we can make good these two things.

1. That the letter of this promise extends farther than the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of that age.

2. However that be, it is certain that the reason of it extends to all that should succeed them in their ministry, to the end of the world.

1. The

1. The letter of this promiſe extends farther than the perſons of the apoſtles, and the continuance of that age. I will eaſily grant that the phraſe πᾶσας τὰς ἡμέρας ſignifies only continually; "I will be "with you continually;" but then the other phraſe, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, until the end of the world, is ſeveral times in ſcripture undeniably uſed for the end and diſſolution of all things, and cannot with any probability be ſhewn to be ever uſed otherwiſe. In this ſenſe it is unqueſtionably uſed three times, Matth. xiii. "The harveſt is the end "of the world." Ver. 39. "So ſhall it be at the "end of the world." Ver. 40. and ver. 59. it is ſaid, that at "the end of the world, the angels ſhall "come forth, and ſever the wicked from the juſt, "and caſt them into the furnace;" which muſt either be underſtood of the end of the world, and of the day of judgment, or there will be no clear text in the whole bible to that purpoſe; and it is very probable, that this phraſe is uſed in the ſame ſenſe, Matth. xxiv. 3. where the diſciples ask our SAVIOUR, "what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the "end of the world?" as will appear to any one that conſiders our SAVIOUR's anſwer to this queſtion; the latter part whereof cannot, without too much violence, be accommodated to any thing but the final diſſolution of the world. Now if this phraſe be every where elſe in ſcripture uſed in this ſenſe, there is no reaſon why it ſhould be taken otherwiſe in the text, only to ſerve the purpoſe of an unreaſonable opinion.

I know there are phraſes very near a-kin to this, which are uſed in a quite different ſenſe, namely, for the expiration of the Jewiſh ſtate, and that we may

SERM. CXXIV.

know how to distinguish them, it is observable, that when the scripture speaks of the end of the world, it is called συντέλεια τῦ αἰῶνϛ, the end of the age, in the singular number; but when it speaks of the times before the gospel, it always expresseth them in the plural; the reason of which is, that famous tradition among the Jews, of the house of Elias, which distributed the whole duration of the world into three ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the MESSIAS; and this last age they looked on with great difference from the rest, as the famous and glorious age, which was to be as it were the beginning of a new world: and therefore the Jews in their writings constantly call it the *sæculum futurum*, the age, or the world to come: and therefore the apostle in this epistle to the Hebrews, calls the state of the gospel by that name, as best known to them, Heb. ii. 5. "But unto the angels "hath he not put in subjection the world to come, "whereof we now speak;" that is, the law was given by the disposition of angels; but the dispensation of the gospel, which is call'd the world to come, was managed and administred by the SON of GOD. So likewise Heb. vi. 5. those miraculous powers which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel, are call'd δυνάμεις τῦ μέλλονϛ αἰῶνϛ, "the powers of the world to come," that is, of the gospel-age.

So that this last age of the gospel, is that which the scripture by way of eminency calls "the age;" those that went before are constantly called αἰῶνες, the ages in the plural number. So we find, Eph. iii 9. the gospel is called "the dispensation of the "mystery that was hid in GOD," ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων, "from

" from ages;" and you have the same phrase, Col. i. 26. Upon the same account, the expiration of the Jewish state, is in scripture called " the last times, " and the last days," Heb. i. 2. " But in the last " days, GOD hath spoken to us by his SON." 1 Cor. x. 11. " These things are written for our admoni- " tion, upon whom τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, the ends of " the ages are come." In the same sense the apostle, Heb. ix. 26. speaking of CHRIST, says, that " he " appeared, ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, at the end of " the ages," to take away sin; that is, at the conclusion of the ages which had gone before, in the last age. So that if we will be governed in the interpretation of this text, by the constant use of this phrase in scripture, the letter of this promise will extend to the end of the world.

2. But however this be, it is certain that the reason of this promise does extend to all those that should succeed the apostles in their ministry to the end of the world; I will suppose now (to give the adversaries their utmost scope) that which we have no reason to grant, that the letter of this promise reacheth only to the apostles and their age, and that our SAVIOUR's meaning was no more but this, that he would send down the HOLY GHOST upon them in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the speedy planting and propagating the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them 'till this work was done. Now supposing there were nothing more than this intended in the letter of it, this ought not much to trouble us, so long as it is certain, that the reason of it does extend to the successors of the apostles in all ages of the world. I do not mean, that the reason of this promise does

give

SERM. CXXIV.

give us sufficient assurance, that GOD will assist the teachers and governors of his church in all ages, in the same extraordinary manner as he did the apostles, because there is not the like reason and necessity for it; but that we have sufficient assurance from the reason of this promise, that GOD will not be wanting to us, in such fitting and necessary assistance, as the state of religion, and the welfare of it in every age shall require: for can we imagine that GOD would use such extraordinary means to plant a religion in the world, and take no care of it afterwards? that he who had begun so good a work, so great and glorious a design, would let it fall to the ground for want of any thing that was necessary to the support of it?

This is reasonable in itself; but we are not also without good ground for thus extending the general reason of particular promises beyond the letter of them. The apostle hath gone before us in this, for Heb. xiii 5, 6. he there extends two particular promises of the old testament to all christians, "let "your conversation (says he) be without covetousness, "and be content with such things as ye have: for he "hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." And again, "the LORD is my helper, I will not "fear what man can do unto me." These promises were made to particular persons; the first of them to Joshua, and the other to David; but yet the apostle applies them to all christians, and to good men in all ages, because the general ground and reason of them extended so far. He who gave Joshua and David this encouragement to their duty, will certainly be as good to us, if we do ours.

And

SERM. CXXIV.

And thus I have done with the firſt controverſy about the ſenſe of theſe words, which concerns the circumſtances of time mentioned in this promiſe, "alway, "to the end of the world," and have plainly ſhewn, that both the letter and the reaſon of this promiſe does extend farther than the perſons of the apoſtles, and the continuance of that age, even to all that ſhould ſucceed them in their miniſtry to the end of the world. I come now to conſider,

Secondly, the ſubſtance of the promiſe itſelf, namely, what is meant by our SAVIOUR's "being "with them." And here our adverſaries of the church of Rome would fain perſuade us, that this promiſe is made to the church of Rome, and that the meaning of it is, that that church ſhould always be infallible, and never err in the faith. But as there is no mention of the church of Rome in this promiſe, nor any where elſe in ſcripture upon the like occaſion, whereby we might be directed to underſtand this promiſe to be made to that church; ſo to any unprejudiced perſon the plain and obvious ſenſe of this promiſe can be no other than this, that our SAVIOUR having commiſſioned the apoſtles to go and preach the chriſtian religion in the world, he promiſes to aſſiſt them in this work, and thoſe that ſhould ſucceed them in it, "to the end of the world." But how any man can conſtrue this promiſe, ſo as to make it ſignify the perpetual infallibility of the Roman church, I cannot for my life deviſe, and yet this is one of the main texts upon which they build that old and tottering fabrick of their infallibility.

Here is a general promiſe of aſſiſtance to the paſtors and governors of the church, in all ages to the end of

SERM. CXXIV. of the world; but that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility, (as it was to the apostles) can neither be concluded from the letter of this promise, nor from the reason of it; much less can it be from hence concluded, that the assistance here promised, if it were to the degree of infallibility, is to be limited and confined to the supreme pastor and governor of the Roman church.

That the assistance here promised shall always be to the degree of infallibility, can by no means be concluded from the letter of this promise. Indeed there is no pretence or colour for it; he must have a very peculiar sagacity; that can find out in these words, "I am with you always," a promise of infallible assistance. Is not the promise which GOD made to Joshua, and which the apostle to the Hebrews applies to all christians, and to all good men in all ages, "I will never leave thee nor forsake "thee," the very same in sense with this, "I will "be with you always?" and yet surely, no man did ever imagine, that by virtue of this promise, every christian, and every good man is infallible.

But neither can it be inferr'd from the reason of this promise, that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility. It was so indeed to the apostles; the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, which were bestowed upon them for the more speedy and effectual planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, were a divine testimony and confirmation to the doctrine which they delivered; and having this divine testimony given to them, we are certain that they were secured from error in the delivery of that doctrine. So that the apostles had no other infallibility, but what depended upon, and was evidenced by the miraculous gifts wherewith they were endowed; and

therefore

therefore without the like gifts, none can with reason pretend to the like infallibility: for infallibility signifies an extraordinary assistance of GOD's SPIRIT, whereby those who are thus assisted are secured from error. This every confident man may, if he pleaseth, pretend to; but no man is to be believed to have it, but he who can give such evidence of it, as is fit to satisfy reasonable men, that he hath it. Now the only sufficient evidence of such an extraordinary divine assistance is the power of miracles. This indeed is the great external testimony of a teacher come from GOD, "if he do such works "as none can do, except GOD be with him;" and this evidence the prophets of old, and our SAVIOUR, and his apostles, always gave of their infallibility. And if the pope and general councils can give the testimony of such miracles for their infallibility, as Moses, and our SAVIOUR, and his apostles did work, we are ready to acknowledge it. Such a testimony as this would give the world a thousand times more satisfaction concerning their infallibility, than all the subtle arguments of Bellarmine, and all their writers. But if they cannot, they may dispute about it to the end of the world; and every man that hath but the same confidence may pretend to it with as much reason as they do.

But to proceed in my argument, here is a plain reason why this extraordinary assistance should be granted to the apostles at first; and another reason as plain, why it should not be continued afterwards. It was reasonable, and in some degree necessary, that the apostles should be thus assisted at the first publication of the gospel, namely to give satisfaction to the world, that they were faithful and true witnesses

SERM. CXXIV.

of the doctrine and miracles of CHRIST. But since this doctrine and these miracles are recorded to posterity, by those very persons that were thus assisted, here is as plain a reason, why after the gospel was planted and establish'd in the world, this infallibility should cease. So long as we have an infallible foundation of faith, namely, the divine revelation consigned in writing, and transmitted down to us by testimony of undoubted credit, what need is there now of a fixt and standing infallibility in the church? but having handled this argument more at large elsewhere, I shall insist no further upon it here.

I have now done with the three things I propounded to discourse upon from this text. You have heard what authority our SAVIOUR had given him; what commission he gave to his disciples; and what assistance he hath promised to the pastors and governors of his church to the end of the world: namely, such an assistance as is suitable to the exigencies of the church, in the several ages and states of christianity; which assistance was at first very extraordinary and miraculous. GOD was pleased to give witness to the first teachers and publishers of the gospel, "with signs and wonders "and divers miracles, and gifts of the HOLY "GHOST;" and this at first was in a very great degree necessary, it not being otherwise imaginable, how christianity could have born up against all that force and violent opposition which was raised against it: but this extraordinary assistance was but a temporary and transient dispensation. GOD did, as it were, pass by "in the strong and mighty wind, in the "earthquake, and in the fire:" but he was in the "still

SERM. CXXIV.

" still voice," that is, he designed to settle and continue that dispensation, in that more calm and secret way of assistance, which offers less violence to the nature of man, but which was intended for the constant and permanent dispensation. So that we have no reason to think, that GOD hath now forsaken his church, though he be not with it in so sensible and extraordinary a manner.

But then if any particular church desire and expect this blessed presence and assistance of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, we must remember, that there is a condition to be performed on our parts. For how absolute soever this promise may be, in respect of the church universal; it is certainly conditional to any particular church, as sad experience in many instances hath shewn. GOD hath long since left the church of Jerusalem, where the gospel was first publish'd; he hath left the church of Antioch, where the believers of the gospel were first call'd christians; he hath left the famous churches of Asia, to that degree of desolation, that the ruins and places of some of them are hardly at this day certainly known. And this may also be the fate of any particular church, not excepting Rome her self, for all her pride and confidence to the contrary. " Behold " therefore the goodness and severity of GOD: to- " wards them that fell, severity; but towards us " goodness, if we continue in his goodness, other- " wise we also shall be cut off."

This, as I observed before, is spoken particularly to the Roman church; the apostle supposeth that the church of Rome her self may be guilty of apostasy from the faith, and cut off by unbelief, and indeed seems to foretel it; which how it consists with

SERM. CXXIV.

their confident pretence to infallibility, let them look to it.

And let all particular churches look to themselves that they do not forfeit this promise of divine assistance. For CHRIST hath not so tied himself to any particular church, but that if they forsake him, he may leave them, and "remove his candle-"stick from them." There have been many sad instances of this, since the first planting of christianity; and we have no small reason to apprehend that it may come to be our own case; for certainly we have many of those marks of ruin among us, which did foretel the destruction of the Jewish church and nation; horrible profaneness and contempt of religion, division and animosities to the highest degree, and an universal dissoluteness and corruption of manners. And why should we, who do the same things, think our selves exempted from the same fate? what can we expect, but that God should deal with us, as he did with them, "take away the kingdom "of GOD from us, and give it to a nation that "will bring forth the fruits of it?"

The condition of this great promise here in the text, to the pastors and governors of the christian church, is the faithful execution of their commission; if they do sincerely endeavour to gain men to the belief and practice of christianity, CHRIST hath promised to be with them. The performance of this condition doth primarily concern the chief governors of the church, and next to them the ministers of the gospel in general, that they should be diligent and faithful in their respective stations, "teaching "men to observe all things whatsoever CHRIST "hath commanded." And if we would make this

our

our great work, to inſtruct our reſpective charges in the neceſſary doctrines of faith, and the indiſpenſable duties of a good life, we ſhould have far leſs trouble with them about other matters. And that we may do this work effectually, we muſt be ſerious in our inſtructions and exemplary in our lives. "Serious in our inſtructions;" this certainly the apoſtle requires in the higheſt degree, when he chargeth miniſters, "ſo to "ſpeak, as the oracles of GOD," to which nothing can be more contrary, than to trifle with the word of GOD, and to ſpeak of the weightieſt matters in the world, the great and everlaſting concernments of the ſouls of men, in ſo ſlight and indecent a manner, as is not only beneath the gravity of the pulpit, but even of a well-regulated ſtage. Can any thing be more unſuitable, than to hear a miniſter of GOD from this ſolemn place to break jeſts upon ſin, and to quibble upon the vices of the age? this is to ſhoot without a bullet, as if we had no mind to do execution, but only to make men ſmile at the mention of their faults; this is ſo nauſeous a folly, and of ſo pernicious conſequence to religion, that hardly any thing too ſevere can be ſaid of it.

And then if we would have our inſtructions effectual, we muſt be "exemplary in our lives." Ariſtotle tells, that the manners of the ſpeaker have κυριοτάτην πίστιν, the moſt ſovereign power of perſuaſion. And therefore Cato puts it into the definition of an orator, that he is, *vir bonus*, *dicendi peritus*, "a good man, and an eloquent ſpeaker." This is true as to all kinds of perſuaſion; the good opinion which men have of the ſpeaker, gives great weight to his words, and does ſtrangely diſpoſe the minds of men to entertain his counſels. But the reputation

reputation of goodneſs is more eſpecially neceſſary and uſeful to thoſe whoſe proper work it is to perſuade men to be good; and therefore the apoſtle, when he had charged Titus to put men in mind of their duty, immediately adds, "in all things "ſhewing thy ſelf a pattern of good works." None ſo fit to teach others their duty, and none ſo likely to gain men to it, as thoſe who practiſe it themſelves; becauſe hereby we convince men that we are in earneſt, when they ſee that we perſuade them to nothing, but what we chooſe to do our ſelves. This is the way to "ſtop the mouths of men," and to confute their malice, by an exemplary piety and virtue. So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. ii. 15. "For ſo is the will of GOD, that by well-doing ye "put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men."

SERMON CXXV.

The difficulties of a chriſtian life conſider'd.

LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

SERM. CXXV.

THERE are two great miſtakes about the nature of religion, equally falſe, and equally pernicious to the ſouls of men: and the devil, whoſe great deſign it is to keep men off from religion

SERM. CXXV.

religion by any means, makes use of both these mistakes, to serve his own purpose and design upon the several tempers of men. Those who are melancholy and serious, he disheartens and discourageth from attempting it, by the extreme trouble and difficulty of it, representing it in so horrid and frightful a shape, incumber'd with such difficulties, and attended with such troubles and sufferings, as are insuperable, and intolerable to humane nature; whereby he persuades men, that they had better never attempt it, since they may despair to go through with it.

On the other hand, those who are sanguine and full of hopes, he possesses with a quite contrary apprehension; that the business of religion is so short and easy a work, that it may be done at any time, and if need be, at the last moment of our lives, tho' it is not so well to put it upon the last hazard; and by this means, a great part of mankind are lull'd in security, and adjourn the business of religion from time to time; and because it is so easy, and so much in their power, they satisfy themselves with an indeterminate resolution to set about that business some time or other before they die, and so to repent, and make their peace with GOD once for all.

These pretences contradict one another, and therefore cannot be both true, but they may both be false, as indeed they are, and truth lies between them; religion being neither so slight and easy a work as some would have it, nor so extremely difficult and intolerable, as others would represent it. To confute the false apprehensions which some have of the easiness of it, our SAVIOUR tells us there must

SERM. CXXV.

must be some striving; and to satisfy us, that the difficulties of religion are not so great and insuperable, as some would make them, our SAVIOUR tells us, that those who "strive" shall succeed and "enter in;" but those who only "seek," that is, do not vigorously set about the business of religion, but only make some faint attempts to get to heaven, "shall not be able to enter in." "Strive "to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say "unto you, will seek to enter in, but shall not be "able."

The occasion of which words of our blessed SAVIOUR, was a question, that was put to him, by one of his disciples, concerning the number of those, that should be saved, ver. 23. One said unto him, "LORD, are there few that be saved?" To which curious question, our SAVIOUR (according to his manner, when such kind of questions were put to him) does not give a direct answer, because it was neither necessary, nor useful for his hearers to be resolved in, it did not concern them, to know what number of persons should be saved, but what course they should take that they might be of that number; and therefore, instead of satisfying their curiosities, he puts them upon their duty; admonishing them, instead of concerning themselves what should become of others, to take care of themselves. "And he said unto them, strive to enter in at the "strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek "to enter in, and shall not be able." He does not say, that "but few shall be saved;" (as some have presumptuously ventur'd to determine) but only few in comparison of those "many, that shall seek "to enter in, and shall not be able."

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SERM. CXXV.

In these words we may consider these two things.

First, the duty enjoined, "strive to enter in at "the strait gate."

Secondly, the reason or argument to enforce it, "for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be "able."

First, the duty enjoined; "strive to enter in at "the strait gate." Which words being metaphorical, I shall strip them of the metaphor, that so we may see the plain meaning of them. Now by this metaphor, or rather allegory, these three things are plainly intended.

1st, the course of a holy and christian life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness, is here represented to us by a way, which every man, that would come to heaven, must walk in. For so St. Matthew (who expresseth this more fully) makes mention of a way, as well as a gate, by which we must enter into it; "strait is the gate, and "narrow is the way, that leadeth to life." And this, tho' it be not express'd by St. Luke, is necessarily understood, "strive to enter in by the "strait gate," that is, into the way that leads to life.

2dly, the first difficulties of a holy and religious course of life, are here represented to us, "by a "strait gate." For the gate at which we enter, and the way in which we walk, can signify nothing else, but the beginning and progress of a holy and religious course.

3dly, our diligence and constancy in this course, are represented by striving, a word which hath a great force and emphasis in it, ἀγωνίζεσθε, a metaphor taken from the earnest contention which was

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SERM. CXXV.

used in the olympick games, by those who strove for mastery in running or wrestling, or any of the other exercises which were there used.

Secondly, here is a reason added to enforce the exhortation or duty; "for many shall seek to enter "in, and shall not be able:" that is, there are a great many that will do something in christianity, and make some faint attempts to get to heaven, who yet shall fall short of it, for want of such a firm resolution and earnestness of endeavour, as is necessary to the attaining of it.

Having thus explain'd the words, I shall take occasion from the first part of them, namely, the duty of exhortation, to handle these three points, very useful for us to consider, and to be well instructed in.

1st, the difficulties of a holy and christian course.

2dly, the firm resolution and earnest endeavour that is required on our part for the conquering of these difficulties.

3dly, that these difficulties are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just discouragement to our endeavours; if we will strive, we may master them.

First, the difficulties of a holy and christian course. And these are either from our selves, or from something without us.

1. From our selves, from the original corruption and depravation of our nature, and the power of evil habits and customs, contracted by vicious practices. Our natures are vitiated and depraved, inclined to evil, and impotent to good; besides, that being habituated to sin and vice, it is a matter of infinite difficulty to break off a custom, and to turn the course of our life another way. Now because this

this is the difficulty of our first entrance into religion, it is represented by "a strait gate," which is hard to get through. SERM. CXXV.

2. There are likewise other difficulties from without; as namely, the opposition and persecution of the world, which was very raging and violent in the first beginnings of christianity. And this our SAVIOUR represents by the ruggedness and roughness of the way, as St. Matthew expresseth it, chap. vii. 14. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that "leads to life," Καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς, *confragosa est via*, (so Grotius renders it) the way is craggy, full of afflictions and troubles.

So that these are the two great difficulties in a christian course, indisposition from within, and opposition from without.

1. Indisposition from within. And this makes religion so much the more difficult, because it checks us at our very first entrance upon our christian course, and makes us unwilling to set out. The corruption of our nature, and those vicious habits which by a long custom of sin we have contracted, do strongly incline us to the contrary way, so that a man must offer great force and violence to himself that will conquer this difficulty. It is one of the hardest things in the world to break off a vicious habit, and to get loose from the tyranny of custom. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of it, as next to a natural impossibility, chap. xiii. 23. "Can the ethio-"pian change his skin? or the leopard his spots? "then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to "do evil." This requires great striving indeed. Nothing shews the spirit and resolution of a man more, than to contend with an inveterate habit; for

SERM. CXXV.

in this case a man strives against the very bent and inclination of his soul; and 'tis easier to set a man against all the world, than to make him fight with himself: and yet this every man must do, who from any wicked course of life, betakes himself seriously to religion; he must as it were lay violent hands upon himself, and fight with the man he was before; and this in scripture is emphatically expressed to us, by "crucifying the old man, with the affections and "lusts thereof." A christian when he first enters upon a holy and good course of life, is represented as two persons or parties at civil war one with another, "the old, and the new man;" so that whoever will be a christian must put off himself, and become another man; and 'tis no easy matter for a man to quit himself.

2. In our christian course, we must likewise expect to meet with great opposition from without. Blessed be GOD, christianity hath generally been for many ages free from this difficulty, which attended the first profession of it; it was then indeed a very steep and craggy way, very rough and thorny, not to be travelled in without sweat and blood; the dangers and hazards of the profession were such, as were not to be encountered by a mere moral resolution, and the natural strength of flesh and blood; the persecution that attended it was so hot, and the torments which threatned it so terrible, that the sensual and inconsiderate part of mankind would rather venture hell at a distance, than run themselves upon so present and evident a danger.

But since these ages of persecution, this difficulty hath been in a great measure removed. Not but the true religion hath still its enemies in the world; but they

they are not let loose, as they were in those times; it is still persecuted and exposed to the malice and reproach, but not to the rage and fury of unreasonable men. In the calmest times there is hardly any man can be a strict and sincere christian, without being liable to hatred and contempt, without denying himself many of those worldly advantages, which those who make no conscience of the strict laws of christianity may make to themselves; so that at all times it requires a good degree of constancy and resolution to persevere in a holy course, and to bear up against the opposition of the world, and to withstand its temptations, to be "harmless and blameless in the "midst of a crooked and perverse nation;" not to be infected with the eminent and frequent examples of vice, and carried down with the stream of a corrupt and degenerate age. So that tho' our difficulties be not always the same, and equal to those which the primitive christians encountered, yet there is enough to exercise our best resolution and care; tho' the main body of the enemies of christianity be broken, and "the sons of Anak be destroyed out "of the land; yet some of the old inhabitants are "still left, to be thorns in our sides, and pricks in "our eyes," that true religion may always have something to exercise its force and vigour upon. I have done with the first point, the difficulties of a christian course. I proceed to the

SERM. CXXV.

Second, the earnest endeavour that is to be used on our part, for the conquering of these difficulties. And to the business of religion, if we will set upon it in good earnest, these three things are required.

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SERM. CXXV.

1ſt, a mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and chriſtian courſe.

2dly, great diligence and induſtry to carry us on in it.

3dly, an invincible conſtancy to carry us through it, and make us perſevere in it to the end.

1ſt, a mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and good courſe. For want of this, moſt men miſcarry and ſtumble at the very threſhold, and never get through the ſtrait gate, never maſter the difficulties of the firſt entrance. Many are well diſpoſed towards religion, and have fits of good inclination that way, (eſpecially in their young and tender years) but they want firmneſs of reſolution to conquer the difficulties of the firſt entrance upon a religious and virtuous life; like the young man that came to our SAVIOUR, well inclined to do ſome good thing, that "he might inherit eternal life;" but when it came to the point, he gave back, he was divided betwixt CHRIST and the world, and had not reſolution enough "to part with all "for him."

Many men (I doubt not) have frequent thoughts and deliberations about a better courſe of life, and are in a good mind to take up, and break off that lewd and riotous courſe they are in; but they cannot bring themſelves to a fixt purpoſe and reſolution: and yet without this nothing is to be done, "the double-minded man is unſtable in all his "ways." There muſt be no indifferency and irreſoluteneſs in our minds, if we will be chriſtians; we muſt not ſtop at the gate, but reſolve to preſs in. We ſee that men can take up peremptory reſolutions in other matters, to be rich and great in the world,

world, and they can be true and steadfast to these resolutions; and why should not men resolve to be wise and happy, and stand to these resolutions and make them good? God is more ready to assist and strengthen these kind of resolutions than any other; and I am sure no man hath so much reason to resolve upon any thing, as to live a holy and virtuous life; no other resolution can do a man that good, and bring him that comfort and happiness that this will. SERM. CXXV.

2dly, the business of religion, as it requires a mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course, so likewise a great diligence to carry us on in it. When we are got through the strait gate, we must account to meet with many difficulties in our way; there are in the course of a christian life many duties to be performed, which require great pains and care; many temptations to be resisted, which will keep us continually upon our guard; a great part of the way is up hill, and not to be climb'd without labour; and the scripture frequently calls upon us, "to work out our salvation with fear "and trembling;" that is, with great care and industry; "to give all diligence to make our calling "and election sure;" to follow holiness, διώκειν, to pursue it with great earnestness. Nothing in this world that is of value, is to be had on other terms; and we have low thoughts of heaven, if we think any pains too much to get thither.

3dly, the business of religion requires an invincible constancy to carry us through it, and to make us persevere in it to the end. Resolution may make a good entrance; but it requires great constancy and firmness of mind, to hold out in a good course.

SERM. CXXV.

A good resolution may be taken up upon a present heat and may cool again; but nothing but a constant and steady temper of mind will make a man persevere; and yet without this, no man shall ever reach heaven. "He that continueth to the "end shall be saved; but if any man draw back, "God's soul will have no pleasure in him." God puts this case by the prophet, and determines it, Ezekiel xviii. 24. "When the righteous man turn- "eth away from his righteousness, shall he live? "all his righteousness that he hath done, shall not "be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath tres- "passed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them "he shall die;" nay so far will his righteousness be from availing him, if he do not persevere in it, that it will render his condition much worse, to have gone so far towards heaven, and at last to turn his back upon it. So St. Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions "of the world, through the knowledge of the "Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are "again entangled therein and overcome; the latter "end is worse with them than the beginning; for "it had been better for them not to have known "the way of righteousness, than after they have "known it, to turn from the holy commandment "delivered unto them." I proceed to the

Third point, namely, that the difficulties of a holy and christian life are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just ground of discouragement to our endeavours. All that I have said concerning the difficulties of religion, was with no design to damp, but rather to quicken our industry; for, upon the whole matter, when all things are duly considered,

considered, it will appear that "CHRIST's yoke "is easy and his burden light; that the com- "mandments of GOD are not grievous;" no, not this commandment of "striving to enter in "at the strait gate;" which I shall endeavour to make manifest by taking these four things into consideration. SERM. CXXV.

1. The assistance which the gospel offers to us. GOD hath there promised "to give his HOLY "SPIRIT to them that ask him;" and by the assistance of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, we may be able to conquer all those difficulties. Indeed if we were left to ourselves, to the impotency and weakness of our own nature, we should never be able to cope with these difficulties; every temptation would be too hard for us; every little opposition would discourage us: but "GOD is with "us, and there is nothing too hard for him." If the principles of a holy life were only the birth of our own resolution, they would easily be born down; but they are from GOD, of a heavenly birth and original; and whatsoever is "born "of GOD, overcometh the world." John i. 12, 13. "As many as received him, to them gave "he power (ἐξουσίαν, the privilege) to become "the sons of GOD, even to them that believe "on his name, which were born not of blood, "nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of "man, but of GOD."

GOD considers the impotency of humane nature, in this deprav'd and degenerate state into which we are sunk, and therefore he hath not left us to our selves; but when he commands us to "work out

SERM. CXXV.

our own salvation," he tells us for our encouragement, that " he himself works in us both to will " and to do ;" he does not bid us to be strong in our own strength, for he knows we have no strength of our own, but to be " strong in the " LORD, and in the power of his might ;" and what may not even a weak creature do, that is so powerfully assisted ? if we will but make use of this strength, nothing can be too hard for us. All that GOD expects from us is, that we should comply with the motions of his SPIRIT, and be as sincere in the use of our own endeavours, as he is in the offers of his grace and assistance.

2. Let us consider, that the greatest difficulties are at first ; 'tis but making one manful onset, and sustaining the first brunt, and the difficulties will abate and grow less, and our strength will every day increase and grow more. " The gate is strait :" but when we have once got through it, " our feet will be " set in an open place." After some struggling to get thro', we shall every day find our selves at more ease and liberty. It will be very hard at first, to master our vicious inclinations, to change the habit of our minds, and the course of our lives, and to act contrary to what we have been long accustomed : but this trouble lasts but for a little while ; these pangs of the new-birth, tho' they be sharp, yet they are not usually of long continuance.

It does indeed require great resolution and firmness of mind, to encounter the first difficulties of religion : but if we can but stand it out for one brunt, our enemy will give way, and the pleasure of victory will tempt us on. It is troublesome to conflict with great

great difficulties, and men are loth to be brought to it: but when we are engaged, it is one of the greateſt pleaſures in the world to prevail and conquer. Many men are loth to go to war; but after a little ſucceſs, they are as loth to give over; that which was a terror to them at firſt, turns into a pleaſure. SERM. CXXV.

3. Conſider that cuſtom will make any courſe of life tolerable, and moſt things eaſy. Religion, and the practice of a holy life is difficult at firſt; but after we are once habituated to it, the trouble will wear off by degrees, and that which was grievous will become eaſy; nay, by degrees, much more pleaſant than ever the contrary practice was. We ſee the daily experience of this, in the moſt difficult and laborious employments of this world; a little pains tires a man at firſt, but when he is once ſeaſoned and enured to labour, idleneſs becomes more tedious and troubleſome to him than the hardeſt work. Cuſtom will make any thing eaſy, tho' it be a little unnatural. Nothing is more unnatural than ſin; 'tis not according to our original nature and frame, but it is the corruption and depravation of it, a ſecond nature ſuperinduced upon us by cuſtom; whereas the practice of holineſs and virtue is agreeable to our original and primitive ſtate, and ſin and vice are the perverting of nature contrary to our reaſon, and the deſign of our beings, and to all obligations of duty and intereſt: but by returning to GOD and our duty, we return to our primitive ſtate; we act naturally, and according to the intention of our beings; and when the force of a contrary cuſtom is taken off, and the bias clapt on the other ſide, "we "ſhall run the ways of GOD's commandments with

SERM. CXXV.

" more delight" and ſatisfaction, than ever we found in the ways of ſin.

For ſin is a violence upon our natures, and that is always uneaſy, yet it is made more tolerable by cuſtom: but religion reſtores men to their natural ſtate, and then we are at eaſe and reſt. Religion is at firſt a yoke and burden: but unleſs we take this upon us, we ſhall never " find reſt to our ſouls."

4thly and laſtly, conſider the reward that religion propounds, and this muſt needs ſweeten and mitigate all the troubles and difficulties that are occaſioned by it. This ſtrait gate, through which we muſt enter; and this craggy way which we are to climb up, leads to life; and he is a lazy man indeed, that will not ſtrive and ſtruggle for life. All that a man can do, he will do for his life, for this miſerable life, which is ſo ſhort and uncertain, and " born to trouble as the ſparks fly upwards;" a life not worth the having, nor worth the keeping with any great care and trouble, if it were not in order to a better and happier life. But 'tis not this life which our SAVIOUR means; that indeed were not worth all this ſtriving for: 'tis eternal life; a ſtate of perfect and endleſs happineſs; of " joys unſpeakable and full of glory." And who would not " ſtrive to enter in at that gate," which leads to ſo much felicity? can a man poſſibly take too much pains, be at too much trouble for a few days, to be happy for ever?

So often as I conſider what incredible induſtry men uſe for the things of this life, and to get a ſmall portion of this world, I am ready to conclude, that either men do not believe the rewards of another

another world, or that they do not underſtand them; elſe they could not think much to be at the ſame pains for heaven, that they can chearfully beſtow for the obtaining of theſe corruptible things. Can we be ſo unconſcionable, as to think GOD unreaſonable, when he offers heaven and everlaſting happineſs to us, upon as eaſy terms, as any thing in the world is ordinarily to be had? and are not we very fooliſh and unwiſe, to put away eternal life from us, when we may have it upon terms ſo infinitely below the true worth and value of it.

I have now done with the three things which I propounded to ſpeak to from the firſt part of theſe words, which are ſo many arguments to enforce the exhortation here in the text; "to ſtrive "to enter in at the ſtrait gate," and to give all diligence, by the courſe of a holy and virtuous life, to get to heaven; and we may aſſure our ſelves, that nothing leſs than this will bring us thither. So our SAVIOUR tells us, in the latter part of the text; that "many ſhall ſeek to enter "in, and ſhall not be able." I proceed now to the

Second part of the text; the reaſon or argument whereby this exhortation is enforced; "ſtrive "to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay "unto you, ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not "be able." Every ſeeking to enter in will not gain our admiſſion into heaven; therefore there muſt be ſtriving: for men may do many things in religion, and make ſeveral faint attempts to get to heaven, and yet at laſt fall ſhort of it, for

SERM. CXXV.

for want of earneſt contention and endeavour which is neceſſary to the attaining of it. We muſt make religion our buſineſs, and ſet about it with all our might, and perſevere and hold out in it, if ever we hope to be admitted to heaven; "for "many ſhall ſeek to enter, that ſhall be ſhut "out."

Now what this ſeeking is, which is here oppoſed to "ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate," our SAVIOUR declares after the text, ver. 25. "When once the maſter of the houſe is riſen up, "and hath ſhut to the door, and ye begin to ſtand "without, and knock at the door, ſaying, LORD, "LORD, open unto us; and he ſhall anſwer and "ſay unto you, I know you not whence ye are; "then ſhall ye begin to ſay, we have eaten and "drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in "our ſtreets; but he ſhall ſay, I tell you, I know "you not whence ye are; depart from me all ye "workers of iniqutiy." St. Matthew mentions ſome other pretences which they ſhould make; upon which they ſhould lay claim to heaven, Matth. vii. 21, 22, 23. "Not every one that ſaith unto me, "LORD, LORD, ſhall enter into the kingdom "of heaven: but he that doth the will of my FA"THER which is in heaven. Many will ſay unto "me in that day, LORD, LORD, have we not "propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have "caſt out devils? and in thy name done many "wonderful works? and then will I profeſs unto "them, I never knew you; depart from me ye "that work iniquity." After all their ſeeking to enter in, and notwithſtanding all theſe pretences, they

they shall be shut out, and be for ever banish'd from the presence of GOD. This shall be their doom, which will be much the heavier, because of the disappointment of their confident expectation and hope. So St. Luke tells us, chap. xiii. 28, 29. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; "when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Ja- "cob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of "GOD, and ye your selves thrust out. And they "shall come from the east, and from the west, "and from the north, and from the south, and "shall sit down in the kingdom of GOD." To which St. Matthew adds, chap. viii. ver 12. "But "the children of the kingdom shall be cast out "into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and "gnashing of teeth." And then our SAVIOUR concludes (Luke xiii. 30.) "Behold, there are last "that shall be first, and first which shall be last." From all which it appears, with what confidence many men, upon these false pretences (which our SAVIOUR calls "seeking to enter in") shall lay claim to heaven, and how strangely they shall be disappointed of their expectation and hope; when they shall find themselves cast out of heaven, who they thought had out-done all others in religion, and were the only members of the true church, and "the children and heirs of the kingdom;" and shall see others, whom they thought to be out of the pale of the true church, and excluded from all terms of salvation, come from all quarters, and find free admission into heaven; and shall find themselves so grosly and widely mistaken, that those very persons, whom they thought to be last, and

of

SERM. CXXV.

of all others fartheſt from ſalvation, ſhall be firſt; and they themſelves, whom they took for "the "children of the kingdom," and ſuch as ſhould be admitted into heaven in the firſt place, ſhall be rejected and caſt out.

So that by "ſeeking to enter," we may underſtand all thoſe things which men may do in religion, upon which they ſhall pretend to lay claim to heaven, nay, and confidently hope to obtain it; and yet ſhall be ſhamefully diſappointed, and fall ſhort of it. Whatever men think, and believe, and do in religion, what privileges ſoever men pretend, what ways and means ſoever men endeavour to appeaſe the deity, and to recommend themſelves to the divine favour and acceptance, all this is but "ſeeking to enter in," and is not that ſtriving which our SAVIOUR requires. "If men do not "do the will of GOD, but are workers of ini-"quity," it will all ſignify nothing to the obtaining of eternal happineſs.

Our SAVIOUR here inſtanceth in mens profeſſion of his religion, "calling him LORD, LORD;" in their perſonal familiarity and converſation with him, by "eating and drinking in his preſence" and company; in their having heard him preach the doctrine of life and ſalvation, "thou haſt taught "in our ſtreets;" in their having propheſied, and wrought great miracles in his name and by his power, "have we not propheſied in thy name? and "in thy name caſt out devils? and in thy name "done many wonderful works?" theſe were great and glorious things which they boaſted of; and yet nothing of all this will do, if men "do not the will

" will of GOD;" notwithstanding all this, he will say unto them, " I know ye not whence ye are, de- " part from me, ye workers of iniquity." SERM. CXXV.

And by a plain parity of reason, whatever else men do in religion, what attempts soever men may make to get to heaven, upon what privileges or pretences soever they may lay claim to eternal life, they will certainly fall short of it, if they " do " not the will of GOD," but " are workers of ini- " quity." My business therefore at this time shall be, to discover the several false claims and pretences which men may make to heaven, and yet shall never enter into it. And to this purpose I shall instance in several particulars, by one or more of which men commonly delude themselves, and are apt to entertain vain and ill-grounded hopes of eternal salvation.

1st, some trust to the external profession of the true religion.

2dly, others have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they rely much upon that.

3dly, there are others that find themselves much affected with the word of GOD, and the doctrines contained in it.

4thly, others are very strict and devout in the external worship of GOD.

5thly, others confide much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which therein they have above others of getting to heaven.

6thly, others think their great zeal for GOD and his true religion, will certainly save them.

SERM. CXXV.

7thly, others go a great way in the real practice of religion.

8thly, others rely much upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, and become the children of GOD, and heirs of everlasting life; and being once truly so, they can never fall from that state, so as finally to miscarry.

Lastly, others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with GOD to receive them to mercy at the last.

I shall briefly go over these particulars, which are the several ways whereby men "seek to enter" into heaven, and hope to get thither at last; and shall shew the insufficiency of them; and that there is something beyond all this necessary to be done for the attainment of everlasting salvation.

1st, some trust to the mere external profession of the true religion, and think it enough to call him, LORD, LORD, to be baptized in his name, and thereby to be admitted members of the christian church. What the apostle says of the profession of the jewish religion, and the outward badge of it, "circumcision," may be applied to the profession of christianity made in baptism, Rom. ii. 17, 25, 28, 29. "Behold thou art called a Jew, and rest-"est in the law, and makest thy boast of GOD. "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the "law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy "circumcision is made uncircumcision: for he is "not a Jew that is one outwardly, neither is "that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; "but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and cir-"cumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and

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SERM. CXXV.

" not in the letter." The case is the same of those who make only an outward profession of christianity. " Baptism verily profiteth, if we perform " the condition of that covenant which we entred " into by baptism;" but if we do not, our baptism is no baptism: for " he is not a christian, " which is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which " is outward in the flesh; but he is a christian " which is one inwardly, and baptism is of the " heart, in the spirit, and not in water only." So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. iii. 21. that baptism is not only the washing of the body with water, and " the putting away of the filth of the flesh; " but the answer of a good conscience towards " GOD."

The promise of eternal life and happiness is not made to the external profession of religion without the sincere and real practice of it. " Why call ye " me LORD, LORD, (says our SAVIOUR) and " do not the things which I say?" The scripture hath no where said, " he that is baptized shall be " saved;" but " he that believeth and is baptized, " he that repenteth and is baptized, shall be saved." This deserves to be seriously considered by a great many christians, who have nothing to shew for their christianity, but their names; whose best title to heaven is their baptism, an engagement entred into by others in their name, but never confirmed and made good by an act of their own; a thing which was done before they remember, and which hath no other effect upon their hearts and lives, than if it were quite forgotten.

2dly, there are others who have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they

SERM. CXXV.

hope that will save them. But if our knowledge in religion, though never so clear and great, do not descend into our hearts and lives, and govern our actions, all our hopes of heaven are built upon a false and sandy foundation. So our SAVIOUR tells us, Matth. vii. 26. "Every one that heareth "these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall "be likened unto a foolish man, which built "his house upon the sand." And John xiii. 17. "If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do "them."

There is not a greater cheat in religion, nothing wherein men do more grosly impose upon themselves, than in this matter, as if the knowledge of religion, without the practice of it, would bring men to heaven. How diligent are many in reading and hearing the word of GOD, who yet take no care to practise it in their lives? like those in the prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. of whom GOD complains, "They come unto thee as the people com-"eth, and they sit before thee as my people, and "they hear my words; but they will not do "them." None do so foolishly, and yet so deservedly miss of happiness, as those who are very careful to learn the way to heaven, and when they have done, will take no pains at all to get thither.

3dly, there are others who find themselves much affected with the word of GOD, and the preaching of it; and this they take for a very good sign, that it has its due effect upon them. And this happens very frequently, that the word of GOD makes considerable impressions upon men for the present, and they are greatly affected with it, and troubled for

for their sins, and afraid of the judgments of GOD, and the terrible vengeance of another world; and upon this they take up some resolutions of a better course, which after a little while vanish and come to nothing. This was the temper of the people of Israel, they delighted to hear the prophet speak to them in the name of GOD, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely "song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and "can play well upon an instrument, for they hear "thy words, but they do them not." Mark vi. 20. it is said that Herod had a great reverence for John the baptist, "that he observed him, "and heard him gladly;" but yet for all that, he continued the same cruel and bad man that he was before. And in the parable of the sower, Matth. xiii. 20. there are one sort of hearers mention'd, who, "when they heard the word, re-"ceived it with joy; but having no root in them-"selves, they endured but for a while, and when "tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the "word, presently they are offended." There are many men who have sudden motions in religion, and are mightily affected for the present; but it must be a rooted and fixt principle, that will endure and hold out against great difficulties and opposition. Acts xxiv. 25. it is said that when St. Paul "reasoned of righteousness, and tem-"perance, and judgment to come, Felix trem-"bled:" and nothing is more frequent, than for men to be mightily startled at the preaching of the word, when their judgments are convinced and born down, and their consciences touched to the quick; a lively representation of the evil

SERM. CXXV.

of

SERM. CXXV.

of ſin, and the infinite danger of a ſinful courſe, may ſtir up the paſſions of grief and fear, and dart ſuch ſtings into the conſciences of men, as may make them extremely reſtleſs and unquiet, and work ſome good thoughts and inclinations in them towards a better courſe; and yet like metals, when the heat is over, they may be the harder for having been melted down.

4thly, others ſhew great ſtrictneſs and devotion in the worſhip of GOD, and this they hope will be accepted, and cannot fail to bring them to heaven: and yet ſome of the worſt of men have been very eminent for this. The Phariſees were the moſt exact people in the world in matter of external ceremony and devotion; and yet for all this, our SAVIOUR plainly tells them, that "they "were farther from the kingdom of GOD," than thoſe who ſeemed to be fartheſt, "than publi- "cans and harlots;" and that becauſe they were ſo very bad, under ſo great a pretence of devotion, "therefore they ſhould receive the greater dam- "nation."

Not but that external devotion is a neceſſary expreſſion of religion, and highly acceptable to GOD, when it proceeds from a pious and devout mind, and when men are really ſuch in their hearts and lives, as their external devotion repreſents them to be: but when the outward garb of religion is only made a cloke for ſin and wickedneſs, when there is nothing within to anſwer all the ſhew that we ſee without, nothing is more odious and abominable to GOD. Theſe are mere engines and poppets in religion, all the motions we ſee without proceed from an artificial contrivance,

trivance, and not from any inward principle of life; and as no creature is more ridiculous than an ape, because the beast makes some pretence to humane shape; so nothing is more fulsom than this hypocritical devotion, because it looks like religion, but is the fartheſt from it of any thing in the world.

5thly, others confide very much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which they have thereby above others of getting to heaven. Thus the Jews confined salvation to themselves, and looked upon all the rest of the world as excluded from it. And not only so, but they believed that by one means or other every Israelite should be saved. So that they were the jewish catholick church, out of which there was no hope of salvation for any.

The same pretence is made by some christians at this day, who engross salvation to themselves, and will allow none to go to heaven out of the communion of their church; and have so ordered the matter, that hardly any that are in it can miscarry. They are members of an infallible church, which cannot possibly err in matters of faith, "they have not only eat and drunk in "CHRIST's presence," but have eat and drunk his very corporal presence, the natural substance of his flesh and blood; they have not only our blessed SAVIOUR, but innumerable other intercessors in heaven; they have not only their own merits to plead for them, but in case they be defective, they may have the merits of others assigned

SERM. CXXV.

signed and made over to them, out of the infinite stock and treasure of the church, upon which they may challenge eternal life, as of right and due belonging to them; and by a due course of confession and absolution, may quit scores with GOD for all their sins from time to time. Or if they have neglected all this, they may, after the most flagitious course of life, upon attrition (that is, upon some trouble for sin, out of fear of hell and damnation) joined with confession and absolution, get to heaven at last; provided the priest mean honestly, and do not, for want of intention, deprive them of the saving benefit and effect of this sacrament.

But is it possible men can be deluded at this rate! as to think that confidence of their own good condition, and want of charity to others, will carry them to heaven? that any church hath the privilege to save impenitent sinners? and they are really impenitent, who do not exercise such a repentance, as the gospel plainly requires; and if men die in this state, whatever church they are of, the great judge of the world hath told us, that "he will not know them," but will bid them "to "depart from him, because they have been workers "of iniquity."

6thly, others think that their zeal for GOD and his true religion will certainly save them. But zeal, if it be not "according to knowledge," if it be mistaken in its object, or be irregular or excessive in the degree, is so far from being a virtue, that it may be a great sin and fault; and tho' it be for the truth, yet if it be destitute of charity, and separated from the virtues of a good life, it will not avail us. So

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St. Paul tells us, that "tho' a man shall give his "body to be burnt; yet if he have not charity, it "is nothing." SERM. CXXV.

7thly, others go a great way in the real practice of religion, and this sure will do the business. And it is very true, and certain in experience, that religion may have a considerable awe and influence upon mens hearts and lives, and yet they may fall short of happiness. Men may in many considerable instances perform their duty to GOD and man; and yet the retaining of one lust, the practice of any one known sin, may hinder them from "entering in at the strait gate." Herod did not only "hear John gladly," but "did many things" in obedience to his doctrine; and yet he was a very bad man. The pharisee thanked GOD (and it may be truly) "that he was not like other men, "an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer;" and yet the penitent publican was "justified before "him." The young man who came to our SAVIOUR to know what he should do to enter into life, and of whom our SAVIOUR testifies, that he was "not far from the kingdom of GOD," and that he "wanted but one thing;" yet for want of that he miscarried. And St. James assures us, that "if a man keep the whole law, "and yet fail in one point, he is guilty of all." If we be workers of iniquity in any one kind CHRIST will disown us, and bid us "depart from "him."

8thly, others rely upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, from whence they can never finally fall. They did once very heartily repent

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SERM. CXXV.

of their wicked lives, and did change their courſe, and were really reformed, and continued a great while in that good courſe. And all this may be certainly true, but it is as certain that they are relapſed into their former evil courſe: and if ſo, the prophet hath told us their doom, that "if "the righteous man forſake his righteouſneſs, his "righteouſneſs ſhall not be remembred; but in "the ſin that he hath ſinned, in that ſhall he "die." So that "a righteous man may turn "from his righteouſneſs, and commit iniquity, and "die in it." For the prophet doth not here (as ſome vainly pretend) put a caſe, which is impoſſible in fact ſhould happen, unleſs they will ſay, that the other caſe which he puts together with it, of "the wicked man's turning away from his wick-"edneſs and doing that which is lawful and "right," is likewiſe impoſſible, which GOD forbid. And that men may fall from a ſtate of grace, is no matter of diſcouragement to good men; but a good caution againſt ſecurity, and an argument to greater care and watchfulneſs, according to that of the apoſtle, "let him that ſtandeth take "heed leſt he fall;" which admonition were ſurely to little purpoſe, if it were impoſſible for them that ſtand to fall.

Laſtly, others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with GOD to receive them to mercy at laſt. This indeed is only "to "ſeek," and not "to ſtrive to enter in;" and theſe perhaps are they whom our SAVIOUR repreſents as "ſtanding without, and knocking at the "door, ſaying LORD, LORD, open unto us;" or as St. Matthew expreſſeth it, "many ſhall ſay to me

me that day, LORD, LORD," which is most probably meant of the day of judgment, when their case is brought to the last extremity; and next to that is the day of death, when men are entring into a state of endless happiness and misery. And no wonder, if the sinner would then be glad, when he can no longer continue in this world, to be admitted into happiness in the next: but the door is then shut to most sinners, and it is a miracle of GOD's grace and mercy, if any repentance that men can then exercise, (which at the best must needs be very confused and imperfect) will then be accepted; if any importunity which men can then use, will be available. For with what face can we expect, that after all the evil actions of a long life, GOD should be mollified towards us by a few good words, and accept of a forc'd and constrained repentance for all our wilful and deliberate crimes, and that he should forgive us all our sins upon a little importunity, when we can sin no longer, and will repent no sooner.

Let us then by all that hath been said, be effectually persuaded to mind the business of religion in good earnest, and with all our might, especially the practice of it in the exercise of all the graces and virtues of a good life. Let us heartily repent of all the sins of our past life, and resolve upon a better course for the future; and let us not delay and put off this necessary work to the most unfit and improper time of old age, and sickness, and death: but let us set about it presently, and enter upon a good course, and make all the speed and progress in it we can.

SERM. CXXV.

And let us remember, that whatever we do in religion will not bring us to heaven if we do not "do the will of our FATHER which is in heaven;" if we do not give up our selves to a constant and universal obedience to his laws. This is "to strive to enter in at the strait gate:" and tho' we "strive to enter in" a thousand other ways, "we shall not be able;" and after all our confidence and conceit of our selves, and our own righteousness, and security of our salvation from the privileges of any church, it will be a strange damp and disappointment to us, to see the sincere christians, who have done the will of GOD, and lived in obedience to his laws, to come from all quarters, and churches in the world, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of "GOD," when we who thought our selves "the "children of the kingdom, shall be cast out," because we have been "workers of iniquity." I will conclude all with those plain words of the apostle, Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. "To them, who by patient "continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and ho"nour, and immortality; eternal life: but unto "them that are contentious, and do not obey the "truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and "wrath, tribulation, and anguish upon every soul "of man that doth evil; in the day when GOD "shall judge the secrets of men by JESUS CHRIST "according to the gospel."

SERMON

SERMON CXXVI.

The parable of the rich man, and Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.

SERM. CXXVI. The first sermon on this text.

I intend by GOD's assistance to go over this parable, than which I think there is none in the whole gospel, which is more apt to affect men, or which is more artificially contrived, and in the circumstances whereof a greater decorum is observed.

It is a great question among interpreters, whether this narration concerning the rich man and Lazarus be a parable, or a history, or a mixture of both. That it is not a history, the resemblance between it and others of our SAVIOUR's parables, will easily convince any man that is not contentious; besides that, in some ancient copies, 'tis usher'd in with this preface, "and he spake a parable to his "disciples: a certain rich man, &c."

But yet as some of the ancients have not improbably conjectur'd, it seems to be such a kind of parable, as had something of a real foundation; as namely, that there was such a poor man as Lazarus is here described, and of that name among the Jews: for in a meer parable 'tis altogether unusual

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SERM. CXXVI.

to name persons, nor is this done in any other of our SAVIOUR's parables.

But whether this be so or not, is not worth the disputing, because it alters not the case as to our SAVIOUR's purpose, and the instructions which we may learn from it.

In the handling of this parable, I shall explain it as I go along, and draw two sorts of instructions or observations from it.

The first sort of observations shall be from the circumstances which serve for the decorum of the parable: and these I will not warrant to be all intended by our SAVIOUR; but only to be true in themselves, and useful, and to have a probable rise from some circumstances of the parable; and therefore I shall speak but very briefly to them.

The second sort of observations shall be such as are grounded upon the main scope and intent of the parable; and these I shall insist more largely upon. I begin,

First, with those observations and instructions which I shall gather up from the circumstances which serve for the decorum of the parable; and I shall take them in order as they lie in the parable.

Ver. 19. "There was a certain rich man, which "was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared "sumptuously every day." Some think that our SAVIOUR in this description reflected upon Herod, because he describes this rich man to be "clothed "in purple." But this conjecture is without reason; for besides that it was not our SAVIOUR's custom in his preaching, to give secret girds to the magistrate; 'tis certain that it was long after our SAVIOUR's time, that purple was appropriated to kings.

kings. It was then, and a great while after, the wear of rich and powerful men, and of the favourites and great men of the court, who are frequently in ancient hiſtories call'd the *purpurati*, thoſe that wore purple. SERM. XXVI.

That which I obſerve from hence, is, that the rich man is not here cenſured for enjoying what he had, for wearing rich apparel, and keeping a great table. This of it ſelf, if it be according to a man's eſtate and quality, and without intemperance, is ſo far from being a fault, that it is a commendable virtue. But here was his fault, that he made all to ſerve his own ſenſuality and luxury, without any conſideration of the wants and neceſſities of others: whereas one of the great uſes of the plentiful tables of rich men, is from the ſuperfluity of them to feed the poor and the hungry.

Ver. 20. "And there was a certain beggar named "Lazarus," as if our SAVIOUR had ſaid, for inſtance, poor Lazarus whom ye all knew. And here I cannot but take notice of the decorum which our SAVIOUR uſes. He would not name any rich man, becauſe that was invidious, and apt to provoke. He endeavours to make all men ſenſible of their duty; but he would provoke none of them by any peeviſh reflexion; for nothing is more improper than to provoke thoſe whom we intend to perſuade. While a man's reaſon is calm and undiſturbed, it is capable of truth fairly propounded; but if we once ſtir up mens paſſions, it is like muddying of the waters, they can diſcern nothing clearly afterwards. But to proceed in the parable.

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, "which was laid at the rich man's gate full of ſores, and

SERM. CXXVI. "and was desirous to be fed with the crumbs which "fell from his table, moreover the dogs came and "licked his sores." Here are three great aggravations of the rich man's uncharitableness.

1st, that here was an object presented it self to him.

2dly, such an object as would move any one's pity, a man reduc'd to extreme misery and necessity.

3dly, a little relief would have contented him.

1st, here was an object presented it self to him, Lazarus laid at a rich man's gate; so that as often as he went out of his own house and came in, he could not but take notice of him. Good men that are charitably disposed, will inquire out objects for their charity, and not always stay till they thrust themselves upon them: but he is a very bad man, who, when an object of great pity and charity is presented, is so far from relenting towards him, that he stops his ear to his cry, and turns away his face from him. He is an uncharitable man, who being rich, and hearing of the miseries of others, does not take them into consideration: but what we see with our eyes is much more apt to affect us. So that this was an argument of a very cruel disposition in the rich man, that having so many occasions of seeing Lazarus, he should never be moved to commiserate him.

2dly, here was such an object presented to him, as would move any one's pity, a man reduced to extreme misery and necessity. Here was no common object of charity, a man, not only in extreme want, but in great pain and anguish, and so helpless, that he was unable to keep off the dogs from being troublesome to him. And yet this did not move him.

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3dly, a very little relief would have contented this poor man, and have been a great kindneſs to him; that which the rich man might have ſpared without the leaſt prejudice to himſelf. He would have been glad to have been "fed with the crumbs "which fell from the rich man's table;" and yet the parable intimates that the rich man was ſo hard-hearted, as not to afford him theſe.

Ver. 22. "And it came to paſs that the beggar "died, and was carried by the angels into Abra-"ham's boſom." Here was a great and ſudden change! he, who when he was alive was neglected by men, and contumelioufly expos'd like a dead carcaſe to the dogs, when he dies, is attended on by the angels, and by them ſafely conveyed into a ſtate of unſpeakable happineſs. He who lay at the rich man's gate, and could find no entrance there, is admitted into heaven. "The beggar died, "and was carried into Abraham's boſom."

'Tis very obſervable, that our SAVIOUR in this parable repreſents men as paſſing immediately out of this life into a ſtate of happineſs or torment. And as in no other place of ſcripture, ſo neither in this, where it had been ſo proper, does our SAVIOUR give the leaſt intimation of the ſtate of purgatory, which the church of Rome hath deviſed, and makes ſo much profit and advantage of, which, becauſe it is ſo viſible and apparent, we may without uncharitableneſs ſuppoſe to be the reaſon why they keep ſuch a ſtir about it.

"And was carried by the angels into Abraham's "boſom." It was an ancient tradition among the Jews, that the angels did attend good men at their death, and carry their ſouls into paradiſe, which is

SERM. CXXVI.

here called "Abraham's bosom." And this was a proper place for Lazarus, who had been neglected by the rich man; to be conveyed into "Abra-"ham's bosom," who was of a quite contrary temper, and loved to entertain and relieve strangers.

And paradise is fitly call'd "Abraham's bosom," because the Jews had so great a veneration for Abraham, and that deservedly for his eminent faith and obedience, that they gave him the first place among the blessed. Hence is the expression, Matth. viii. 11. of "sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, "and Jacob in the kingdom of GOD." Now this expression of "being in Abraham's bosom," is an allusion to the custom of feasts among the Jews, where the most esteemed and beloved guest sat next him that was chief at the feast, and leaned on his bosom. Hence St. John is call'd the disciple whom JESUS loved, because when he sat at meat, he leaned on his bosom. John xiii. 23. Hence likewise is the expression of our SAVIOUR's being "in the "bosom of his FATHER," to signify his dearness to him, John i. 18. "No man hath seen GOD "at any time; the only begotten SON which is "in the bosom of the FATHER, he hath decla-"red him."

I proceed. "The rich man also died, and was "buried." "The rich man also died;" this is very elegant and emphatical, insinuating to us, what the scripture so often takes notice of, that riches, for all mens confidence in them, will not deliver from death. This rich man indeed was out of danger of being starved and famished, as poor Lazarus was. But death had no other ways to come at him. It is probable enough, that he might be surfeited by "fa-

"ring

" ring ſumptuouſly every day." " The rich man " alſo died." SERM. CXXVI.

" And was buried." And here again we may obſerve the ſtrict decorum which our SAVIOUR uſes in this parable. It is not ſaid of Lazarus, that he was buried, but only that " he died; " it is probable that he was flung out of the way into ſome pit or other: but of the rich man it is ſaid, " he was " buried." And this is all the advantage which a rich man hath by a great eſtate after he is dead, to have a pompous and ſolemn funeral; which yet ſignifies nothing to him after death, becauſe he is inſenſible of it.

Ver. 23. " And in hell he lift up his eyes being " in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and " Lazarus in his boſom." As corporal acts are attributed to GOD in ſcripture, ſo likewiſe to ſeparated ſouls.

" In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments;" intimating to us, that this ſenſual and voluptuous man had ſtupidly paſt away his life without any ſerious thoughts and conſideration: but now at laſt he was awakened, when it was too late, and began to conſider. " In hell he lift up his eyes, being in " torments."

O the ſtupidity of ſinners! who run on blindly in their courſe, and never open their eyes 'till they are fallen into the pit; who cannot be brought to conſider, 'till conſideration will do them no good; 'till it ſerve to no other purpoſe, but to enrage their conſciences, and to multiply the ſtings of them.

Thus it was with this rich man, " he lift up his " eyes being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar " off, and Lazarus in his boſom." Our SAVI-

SERM. CXXVI.

our represents him as seeing that which would then most probably come to his mind. Feeling his own misery, he began to consider the happy condition of the poor man whom he had so cruelly neglected. And indeed one great part of the torment of hell consists in those reflexions which men shall make upon the happiness which they have wilfully lost and neglected, and the sins whereby they have plunged themselves into that miserable state.

Ver. 24. "And he cried, and said, father Abra-"ham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that "he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and "cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this "flame." See how the scene is changed; now he is fain to beg relief of the beggar, who had sued to him in vain.

"Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his "finger in water, and cool my tongue." Here is another very decent circumstance; the rich man is represented as not having the face to beg any great relief from Lazarus, towards whom he had been so hard-hearted. "To dip the tip of his finger in "water, to cool his tongue," had been a very great favour from Lazarus, to whom the rich man had denied even the "crumbs which fell from his "table."

"For I am tormented in this flame." The scripture loves to make use of sensible representations, to set forth to us the happiness and misery of the next life; partly by way of condescension to our understandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our affections. For whilst we are in the body, and immers'd in sense, we are most apt to be moved by such descriptions of things as are sensible;

ble; and therefore the torments of wicked men in hell, are usually in scripture described to us, by one of the quickest and sharpest pains that humane nature is ordinarily acquainted withal, namely, by the pain of burning; fire being the most active thing in nature, and therefore capable of causing the sharpest pains. SERM. CXXVI.

But we cannot from these and the like expressions of scripture certainly determine that this is the true and proper pain of hell: all that we can infer from these descriptions is this, that the sufferings of wicked men in the other world, shall be very terrible, and as great, and probably greater than can possibly be described to us by any thing that we are now acquainted withal; for who knows the power of GOD's anger, and the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? for as the glory of heaven, and the joys of GOD's presence are now inconceivable; so likewise are the torments of hell, and the miseries of the damned. "Eye hath not "seen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the "heart of man," those dreadful things "which "GOD prepares for them that hate him." Who can imagine the utmost significancy of those phrases which the scripture uses to set forth this to us, of GOD's being "a consuming fire," of being "tor-"mented in flames," of GOD's "wrath and jea-"lousy smoking" against sinners, and all the curses that are written in his book, falling upon them? who can conceive the horror of those expressions, "of the worm that dies not, and the fire that is "not quenched," of GOD's "pouring out the "vials of his wrath," of being "deliver'd over to "the tormentor," of being "thrust into utter dark-

"ness,"

SERM. CXXVI.

" neſs," of being " caſt into the lake of fire and " brimſtone?" Theſe forms of ſpeech ſeem to be borrowed from thoſe things which among men are moſt dreadful and affrighting; and to be calculated and accommodated to our capacities; and not ſo much intended to expreſs to us the proper and real torments of hell, as to convey to us in a more ſenſible and affecting manner the ſenſe of what the ſcripture ſays in general, that " it is a fearful thing to " fall into the hands of the living GOD."

Ver. 25. " But Abraham ſaid, ſon, remember " that thou in thy life-time received'ſt thy good " things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now " he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Abra- " ham ſaid, ſon, remember." It is very obſervable, how our SAVIOUR chooſes to repreſent to us the diſcourſe between Abraham and the rich man; tho' there was the greateſt difference between them imaginable, the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet they treated one another civilly. Abraham is brought in, giving the common terms of civility to this wretched wicked man, and calling him ſon; " ſon, remember." It was indeed a very ſevere thing which he ſaid to him; he put him in mind of his former proſperity, and of his fault in his unmerciful uſage of Lazarus; " remember, ſon, " that thou in thy life-time received'ſt thy good " things, and Lazarus, &c." But yet whilſt he ſpeaks ſuch ſharp things to him, he bates bad language. A man may ſay very ſevere things, where a juſt occaſion requires it; but he muſt uſe no reviling; *rem ipſam dic, mitte malè loqui*, " ſay the " thing, but uſe no bad language." And this, as one ſays, is the true art of chiding, the proper ſtile wherein

wherein we must use to reprove. If we do it with malice, and anger, and contempt, it is misbecoming, even tho' we despair of doing good: but if we hope for any good effect, we are like to miss of it this way; for as the apostle says excellently, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness "of GOD."

SERM. CXXVI.

Some think that Abraham gives the rich man the title of son ironically, and by way of jeer: but without all reason. For surely there is not so much bad nature in heaven, as to scoff at those who are in misery. Besides that, we find our SAVIOUR observing this decorum of good language in other of his parables: as particularly, in that of the king who invited guests to the marriage of his son, Matth. xxii. 11. When the king saw there the man, that came without his wedding garment, tho' he past a very severe sentence upon him, yet he gives him the common terms of civility; "friend, how camst "thou hither?"

This should teach us christians, how we ought to demean ourselves towards those who are at the greatest distance from us, and how we ought to behave ourselves towards one another in the greatest differences of religion. None sure can be at greater distance, than Abraham in paradise, and the rich man in hell; and yet our SAVIOUR would not represent them as at terms of defiance with one another. One might have expected that Abraham should have reviled this poor wretch, and disdain'd to have spoken to him: but this is not the temper of heaven, nor ought it to be of good men upon earth, even towards the worst of men.

How

SERM. CXXVI.

How does this condemn our rudeneſs and impatience with one another in our religious differences! we think no terms bad enough to uſe towards one another: and yet one of the moſt famous diſputes that we find mentioned in ſcripture, and that between the moſt oppoſite parties that can be imagined, was managed after another faſhion; I mean that recorded by St. Jude between Michael the archangel, and the devil, ver. 9. "Yet "Michael the archangel, when contending with "the devil, he diſputed about the body of Moſes, "durſt not bring a railing accuſation," he durſt not allow himſelf this, no not in the heat of diſpute, when perſons are moſt apt to fly out into paſſion, becauſe it was indecent, and would have been diſpleaſing to GOD; this I believe is the true reaſon why it is ſaid, "he durſt not bring a railing accu-"ſation." And yet I may add another, which is not improper for our conſideration, I am ſure it hath a good moral; the devil would have been too hard for him at railing, he was better skill'd at that weapon, and more expert at that kind of diſpute.

Which conſideration may be a good argument to us againſt reviling any man. If we revile the good, we are unjuſt, becauſe they deſerve it not; if we revile the bad, we are unwiſe, becauſe we ſhall get nothing by it. I could almoſt envy the character which was given of one of the Romans; *neſcivit quid eſſet maledicere*, "he knew not what "it was to give bad language."

I proceed. "Son, remember that thou in thy life-"time receivedſt thy good things." "Thy good "things," thoſe which thou didſt value and eſteem

ſo

so highly, and didst place thy chief happiness in, as if there had been no other good to be sought after. "Thy good things," and indeed so he used them, as if he had been the sole lord and proprietor of them, and they had not been committed to him, as a steward, to be dispensed for his master's use, for the clothing of the naked, and the feeding of the hungry, and the relieving of those in distress. SERM. CXXVI.

Ver. 27, 28. "Then he said, I pray thee there-
"fore, father, that thou wouldst send him to
"my father's house: for I have five brethren; that
"he may testify unto them, lest they also come
"into this place of torment." Here the rich man, tho' in hell, is represented as retaining some tenderness for his relations, as solicitous lest they should be involved in the same misery with himself. The last piece of that which commonly remains in men, is natural affection, which is not so much a virtue, as a natural principle, and is common to many brute beasts. When a man puts off this, we may give him up for lost to all manner of goodness. To be "without natural affection," is the worst character can be given of a man. Our SAVIOUR represents this rich man in hell as not so totally degenerate as to be quite destitute of this.

I think some attribute this motion of the rich man concerning his brethren to another cause; as if he had desired it, not out of kindness to them, but out of regard to himself, as being afraid that if his brethren who probably were corrupted by his example, had perish'd by that means, it would have been an aggravation of his torments. But this conjecture is too subtile, and without any good

SERM. CXXVI.

ground; for every man carries his burden of guilt with him out of this world, and it is not increased by any consequence of our actions here. For the crime of a bad example is the same whether men follow it or not, because he that gives bad example to others, does what in him lies to draw them into sin; and if they do not follow it, that is no mitigation of his fault.

I have but one observation more, and that is from the mention of his brethren as his nearest relations, which is a great aggravation of the rich man's uncharitableness, because he is represented as having no children to take care for, and yet he would not consider the poor.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, endeavour'd to explain this parable, and have made such observations from the circumstances of it, as may be useful for our instruction. But as I premised at first; I will not warrant all these observations to be certainly intended by our SAVIOUR; I know very well that every circumstance of a parable is not to be prest too far, the moral accommodation does chiefly belong to the main scope of it, and many circumstances are only brought in to fill up the parable, and to make up a handsomer way for that which is most material, and principally intended: but so long as the observations are true and useful, and have a fair colour and occasion from the circumstances, it is well enough; to be sure there is no harm done. I proceed to the second sort of observations, namely, such as are drawn from the main scope and intent of the parable, which I promised to speak more largely to; and they are six, which I shall handle in order.

First,

SERM. CXXVI.

Firſt, I obſerve that uncharitableneſs and unmerciſulneſs to the poor, is a great and damning ſin. We find no other fault imputed to the rich man but this, that he took no care out of his ſuperfluity and abundance to relieve this poor man that lay at his gate. He is not charged for want of juſtice, but of charity; not for having got a great eſtate by fraud or oppreſſion, but that in the midſt of this abundance he had no conſideration and pity for thoſe that were in want.

I ſhall endeavour to make out this obſervation by the parts of it.

1ſt, that unmercifulneſs and uncharitableneſs to the poor is a great ſin.

2dly, ſuch a ſin, as alone and without any other guilt, is ſufficient to ruin a man for ever. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeverally.

1ſt, that unmercifulneſs and uncharitableneſs to the poor is a very great ſin. It contains in its very nature two black crimes, inhumanity and impiety.

1. Inhumanity; it is an argument of a cruel and ſavage diſpoſition, not to pity thoſe that are in want and miſery. And he doth not truly pity the miſeries of others, that doth not relieve them when he hath ability and opportunity in his hands. Tenderneſs and compaſſion for the ſufferings of others is a virtue ſo proper to our nature, that it is therefore call'd humanity, as if it were eſſential to humane nature, and as if without this, we did not deſerve the name of men. To ſee men like ourſelves, "bone of our bone, and fleſh of our "fleſh," labour under want and neceſſity, and yet not to be moved to commiſerate them, this is

SERM. CXXVI.

a ſign that we have put off our own nature, otherwiſe we ſhould pity the ſufferings of it in others. For whenever we behold a man like ourſelves groning under want, and preſt with neceſſity, and do not relent towards him, and are not ready to relieve him, we are hard-hearted to our own nature, and do in ſome ſenſe what the apoſtle ſays "no man ever did" (that is, none retaining the temper and affections of a man) "hate his own "fleſh."

This the ſcripture ſpeaks of as a moſt barbarous ſort of inhumanity, and calls it murder, 1 John iii. 15. "Whoſo hateth his brother is a mur-"derer;" and not to relieve our brother in want, is to hate him; for this is the inſtance which the apoſtle gives at the 17th verſe, "whoſo hath this "world's goods, and ſeeth his brother in want, and "ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him;" whoſo doth not conſider the poor, is a manſlayer and a murderer, he is cruel to his own nature, nay were he ſufficiently ſenſible of the condition of humane nature, he is cruel to himſelf.

Seeſt thou a poor man in great miſery and want, there is nothing that hath befallen him, but what is common to man, what might have been thy lot and portion as well as his, and what may happen to thee or thine another time. Make it therefore thine own caſe; (for ſo the providence of God may make it one time or other, and thou provokeſt him to make it ſo ſpeedily by thy unmerciful diſpoſition toward the poor;) I ſay, make it thine own caſe, if thou wert in the poor man's condition, and he in thine, conſult thine own bowels, and tell me how thou wouldſt wiſh him to be affected

fected toward thee. Wouldſt thou be willing that he ſhould ſlight and repulſe thee, and ſhut up his bowels of compaſſion from thee? if not, then do not thou ſo deal with him, conſider that it may be thine own caſe, therefore do not thou give the world any bad example in this kind, do not teach men to be unmerciful, leſt they learn of thee, and thou find the ill effects of it, when it comes to be thine own condition. This is the firſt aggravation of this ſin, the inhumanity of it. But, SERM. CXXVI.

2. Beſides the inhumanity of this ſin, it is likewiſe a great impiety toward GOD. Unmercifulneſs to the poor hath this fourfold impiety in it; it is a contempt of GOD; an uſurpation upon his right; a ſlighting of his providence; and a plain demonſtration that we do not love GOD, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and inſincere.

1. It is a contempt of GOD, and a reproaching of him; ſo Solomon tells us, Prov. xiv. 31. "He "that oppreſſeth the poor," (not only he that dealeth unjuſtly with a poor man, but he that is uncharitable towards him, as appears by the oppoſition, "but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the "poor;" here oppreſſion of the poor is oppoſed to want of charity towards him;) "he that oppreſſeth "the poor reproacheth his maker." How is that? he deſpiſeth GOD who made him after his own image and likeneſs: for the poor man bears the image of GOD as well as the rich, ſo that thou canſt not oppreſs or neglect him, without ſome reflexion upon GOD, whoſe image he bears.

2. The uncharitable man is an uſurper upon GOD's right, "the earth is the LORD's and the fulneſs "thereof, and he hath given it to the children of "men,"

SERM. CXXVI.

"men," not absolutely to dispose of as they please, but in trust, and with certain reservations, so as to be accountable to him for the disposal of it. In respect of other men, we are indeed true proprietors of our estates: but in respect of GOD, we are but stewards; and he will call us to an account how we have laid them out. So much as we need is ours; but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our family, in the rank wherein GOD hath placed us, all that is given to us, that we may give it to others. And if GOD hath been liberal to us in the blessings of this life, it is on purpose to give us an opportunity, and to engage us to be so to others that stand in need of our charity; and we are false to our trust, if we keep those things to our selves, which we receive from GOD for this very end that we might distribute them to others, according to the proportion of our ability and their necessity. This is to hide our LORD's talent in a napkin, and that which thou storest up in this case is unjustly detained by thee; for GOD intended it should have been for bread for the hungry, and for clothes for the naked, for the relief and support of those who were ready to perish.

3. The uncharitable man is impious in slighting of GOD's providence. He does not consider that riches and poverty are of the LORD, that he can soon change our condition, and that it is an easy thing with him to make a rich man poor. We do not sufficiently reverence the providence which rules the world, if when GOD hath blest us with plenty and abundance, we have no pity and regard for those that are in need. GOD can soon turn the wheel, and lay thee as low as the poor man whom thou dost neglect.

neglect. He can "cast down the mighty from their seat, and exalt the humble and the meek; fill "the hungry with good things, and send the rich "empty away." SERM. CXXVI.

GOD's providence could easily have disposed of things otherwise, to have secured every man from want: but he hath on purpose order'd this variety of conditions, high and low, rich and poor, not that some men might have an advantage to insult over and despise others, but that there might be an opportunity for the exercise of several virtues; that the poor might have an opportunity to exercise their dependence upon GOD, and their patience and submission to his will; and that the rich might shew their temperance, and moderation, and charity.

4. Unmercifulness to the poor is a plain demonstration that we do not love GOD, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere. St. James tells us, that "pure religion "and undefiled before GOD and the FATHER, "is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow," Jmes i. 27. That "the wisdom which is from "above is full of mercy and good fruits," chap. iii. 17. St. John represents this uncharitable disposition as utterly inconsistent with the true love of GOD, 1 John iii. 17. "But whoso hath this world's goods, "and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth "up his bowels of compassion from him; how "dwelleth the love of GOD in him?" In vain does such a man pretend to love GOD; nay, chap. iv. ve. 20. he tells us that it is impossible such a man should love GOD. "If a man say I love GOD, "and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that "loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how "can

SERM. CXXVI.

" can he love GOD whom he hath not seen?" This deserves to be seriously consider'd by those who make a great shew of devotion, and are at great pains in prayer, and fasting, and reading, and hearing the word of GOD, and in all other frugal exercises of religion, which stand them in no money; lest all their labour be lost for want of this one necessary and essential part; lest with the young man in the gospel, after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by CHRIST for lack of " this one thing." I have done with the first part of the observation, that unmercifulness is a very great sin. I proceed to the

2d, that it is such a sin, as alone, and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. The parable lays the rich man's condemnation upon this; it was the guilt of this sin that tormented him when he was in hell. The scripture is full of severe threatnings against this sin. Prov. xxi. 13. " Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor " he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." GOD will have no regard or pity for the man that regardeth not the poor. That is a terrible text, James ii. 13. " He shall have judgment without " mercy, that hath shewed no mercy."

Our SAVIOUR hath two parables to represent to us the danger of this sin; this here in the text, and that in Luke xii. concerning the covetous man that enlarged his barns, and was still laying up, but laid nothing out upon the poor: upon which our SAVIOUR makes this observation, which is the moral of the parable, ver. 21. " So is he that " layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich to- " wards GOD;" so shall he be, such an issue of his folly

folly may every one expect, who layeth up treasure for himself, but does not lay up riches with GOD. How is that? the scripture tells us, by works of mercy and charity; this our SAVIOUR calls "laying up for our selves treasures in heaven;" Matth. vi. 20. And Luke xii. 33. he calls giving of alms, "providing for our selves bags that wax "not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not." SER M. CXXVI.

There is no particular grace and virtue to which the promise of eternal life is so frequently made in scripture, as to this of mercy and charity to the poor. Matth. v. 7. "Blessed are the "merciful, for they shall find mercy." Which promise, as it does not exclude a reward in this world, so it seems principally to respect the mercy of GOD at the great day. Luke xiv. 12, 13, 14. "When thou makest a feast, invite not the rich, "for they will recompense thee again: but invite "the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and "the blind, for they cannot recompense thee; "but thou shalt be recompensed at the resur-"rection of the just," Luke xvi. 9. "Make "therefore to your selves friends of the mammon "of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail, they "may receive you into everlasting habitations." 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. "Charge them that are "rich in this world, that they do good, that they "be rich in good works, ready to distribute, wil-"ling to communicate, laying up in store for them-"selves a good foundation," as the word θεμέλιον is sometimes used, "a good treasure against the "time which is to come, that they may lay hold of "eternal life."

7.

SERM. CXXVI.

But the moſt conſiderable text of all other to this purpoſe, is in Matth. xxv. where our SAVIOUR gives us a deſcription of the judgment of the great day: and if that be a true and proper repreſentation of the proceſs of that day, then the grand enquiry will be, what works of charity have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly ſentence ſhall be paſt upon us.

The proper reſult from all this diſcourſe is to perſuade men to this neceſſary duty. Our eternal happineſs does not ſo much depend upon the exerciſe of any one ſingle grace or virtue, as this of charity and mercy. Faith and repentance are more general and fundamental graces, and as it were the parents of all the reſt: but of all ſingle virtues the ſcripture lays the greateſt weight upon this of charity; and if we do truly believe the precepts of the goſpel, and the promiſes and threatnings of it, we cannot but have a principal regard to it.

I know how averſe men generally are to this duty, which makes them ſo full of excuſes and objections againſt it.

1. They have children to provide for. This is not the caſe of all, and they whoſe caſe it is, may do well to conſider, that it will not be amiſs to leave a bleſſing, as well as an inheritance to their children.

2. They tell us they intend to do ſomething when they die. I doubt that very much; but granting their intention to be real, why ſhould men chooſe to ſpoil a good work, and take away the grace and acceptableneſs of it, by the manner of doing? it ſhews a great backwardneſs to the work, when

when we defer it as long as we can. He that will not do good, till he be forced by the laſt neceſſity, *diu noluit*, "was long unwilling." It is one of the worſt compliments we can put upon GOD, to give a thing to him when we can keep it no longer. SERM. CXXVI.

3. Others ſay they may come to want themſelves, and it is prudence to provide againſt that. To this I anſwer.

(1.) I believe that no man ever came the ſooner to want for his charity. David hath an expreſs obſervation to the contrary, Pſal. xxxvii. 25. "I have "been young and now am old, yet have I not "ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging "bread." And tho' he uſes a general word, yet that by the righteous here he intended the merciful man, is evident from the next words, "he is ever "merciful and lendeth."

And beſides David's obſervation, we have expreſs promiſes of GOD to ſecure us againſt this fear. Pſal. xli. 1, 2. "Bleſſed is he that conſider-"eth the poor, the LORD will deliver him in "time of trouble, the LORD will preſerve him "and keep him alive, and he ſhall be bleſſed upon "the earth." Prov. xxviii. 27. "He that giveth "unto the poor ſhall not lack."

(2.) Thou mayeſt come to want tho' thou give nothing; thou may'ſt loſe that which thou haſt ſpared in this kind as well as the reſt; thou may'ſt loſe all and then thou art no better ſecured againſt want, than if thou hadſt been charitable. Beſides that, when thou art brought to poverty, thou wilt want the comfort of having done this duty,

SERM. CXXVI.

and may'ſt juſtly look upon the neglect of this duty as one of the cauſes of thy poverty.

(3.) After all our care to provide for our ſelves, we muſt truſt the providence of GOD; and a man can in no caſe ſo ſafely "commit himſelf to GOD "as in well-doing." If the providence of GOD (as we all believe) be peculiarly concern'd to bleſs one man more than another, I dare ſay the charitable man will not have the leaſt portion.

4. There is a worſe objection than all theſe made by ſome grave men, who would be glad under pretence of piety to ſlip themſelves out of this duty; and that is this, that it ſavours of popery to preſs good works with ſo much earneſtneſs upon men, as if we could merit heaven by them; ſo that they dare not be charitable out of a pious fear, as they pretend, leſt hereby they ſhould entertain the doctrine of merit.

But if the truth were known, I doubt covetouſneſs lies at the bottom of this objection: however it is fit it ſhould be anſwer'd. And,

(1.) I ſay that no man that is not prejudiced either by his education or intereſt, can think that a creature can merit any thing at the hand of GOD, to whom all that we can poſſibly do, is antecedently due; much leſs that we can merit ſo great a reward as that of eternal happineſs.

(2.) Tho' we deny the merit of good works, yet we firmly believe the neceſſity of them to eternal life. And that they are neceſſary to eternal life, is as good an argument to perſuade a wiſe man to do them, as if they were meritorious; unleſs a man be ſo vain-glorious as to think heaven not worth the having

having unleſs he purchaſe it himſelf at a valuable consideration. SERM. CXXVI.

And now let me earneſtly intreat you, as you love GOD and your own ſouls, not to neglect this duty; leſt you bring your ſelves to the ſame miſerable ſtate with this rich man, to whom the leaſt charity that could be ask'd was denied. Our SAVIOUR hath purpoſely left this parable on record, to be a teſtimony and a witneſs to us; leſt we being guilty of the ſame ſin, "ſhould come into the ſame place of "torment."

And if any ask me according to what proportion of his eſtate he ought to be charitable? I cannot determine that. Only, let no man neglect his duty, becauſe I cannot (and it may be no one elſe can) tell him the exact proportion of his charity to his eſtate. There are ſome duties that are ſtrictly determined, as thoſe of juſtice; but GOD hath left our charity to be "a free-will offering." In the proportion of this duty, every one muſt determine himſelf by prudence and the love of GOD: GOD hath left this duty undetermined, to try the largeneſs of our hearts towards him; only to encourage us to be "abundant in this grace," he hath promiſed, that according to the proportion of our charity, ſhall be the degree of our happineſs, 2 Cor. ix. 6. "He that "ſoweth plentifully, ſhall reap plentifully." But let us be ſure to do ſomething in this kind; any part of our eſtate rather than none.

I will conclude with that excellent counſel of the ſon of Syrach, Eccl. iv. "My ſon, defraud not the "poor, and make not the needy eye to wait long; "make not a hungry ſoul ſorrowful, neither pro- "voke a man in his diſtreſs; add not more trou- "ble

" ble to a heart that is vexed, defer not to give to " him that is in need. Reject not the supplication " of the afflicted, nor turn away thy face from a " poor man; turn not away thy eye from the needy, " and give him none occasion to curse thee. For " if he curse thee in the bitterness of his soul, his " prayer shall be heard of him that made him. Let " it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the " poor, and give him a friendly answer with meek- " ness. Be as a father to the fatherless, and instead " of a husband to their mother; so shalt thou be " as the SON of the most high, and he shall love " thee more than thy mother doth."

SERMON CXXVII.

The parable of the rich man, and Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.

SERM. CXXVII.

The second sermon on this text.

I Proceed to our second observation, that a man may be poor and miserable in this world, and yet dear to GOD. The begger Lazarus, tho' he was so much slighted, and despised in his life-time by this great rich man, yet it appeared when he came to die, that he was not neglected by GOD, for

for " he gave his angels charge concerning him," to convey him to happineſs, ver. 22. " the beg- " gar died, and was carried into Abraham's bo- " ſom." SERM. CXXVII.

But this truth is not only repreſented to us in a parable, but exemplified in the life of our bleſſed SAVIOUR. Never was any man ſo dear to GOD as he was, for he was " his only begotten SON, " his beloved SON, in whom he was well pleaſed :" and yet how poor and mean was his condition in this world! inſomuch that the Jews were offended at him, and could not own one that appeared in ſo much meanneſs, for the true MESSIAS. He was born of mean parents, and perſecuted as ſoon as he was born; he was deſtitute of worldly accommodations; " the foxes had holes, and the " birds of the air had neſts; but the SON of man " had not where to lay his head. He was deſpiſed " and rejected of men, a man of ſorrows, and ac- " quainted with grief."

GOD could have ſent his SON into the world with majeſty and great glory, and have made all the kings of the earth to have bowed before him, and paid homage to him: but the wiſdom of GOD choſe rather that he ſhould appear in a poor and humble, in a ſuffering and afflicted condition, to confound the pride of the world, who meaſure the love of GOD by theſe outward things, and think that GOD hates all thoſe whom he permits to be afflicted.

Now it was not poſſible to give a greater and clearer demonſtration of this truth, that goodneſs and ſuffering may meet together in the ſame perſon, than in the SON of GOD, " who did no ſin, neither

" was

SERM. CXXVII.

" was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleaſed the " LORD to bruiſe him, and to put him to grief."

Afflictions in this world are ſo far from being a ſign of GOD's hatred, that they are an argument of his love and care; " whom the LORD loveth " he chaſteneth, and ſcourgeth every ſon whom he " receiveth." Thoſe he deſigns for great things hereafter, he trains up by great hardſhips in this world, and by many tribulations prepares them for a kingdom. This courſe GOD took more eſpecially in the firſt planting of chriſtianity; the poor chiefly were thoſe that received the goſpel. " Not " many mighty, nor many noble; but the baſe " things of the world, and the things that were " deſpiſed did GOD chooſe." " Hearken my " beloved brethren, (ſaith St. James chap. ii. 5.) " hath not GOD choſen the poor in this world, rich " in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he " hath promiſed to them that love him?"

Now this conſideration ſhould perſuade to patience under the greateſt ſufferings and afflictions in this world. GOD may be our FATHER, and chaſten us ſeverely; nay this very thing is rather an argument that he is ſo. GOD may love us tho' the world hate us. 'Tis but exerciſing a little patience, and theſe ſtorms will blow over, and we ſhall be removed into a calmer region, where " all tears " ſhall be wiped from our eyes; and death and ſor- " row ſhall be no more." This was the portion of the SON of GOD here; but " it is a faithful ſay- " ing, that if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo " live with him, if we ſuffer with him, we ſhall " alſo reign with him." Therefore thoſe who ſuffer in this world ought not to be moved, " as tho'

" ſome

" ſome ſtrange thing happened unto them; but they " ſhould rather rejoice, in as much as they are par- " takers of CHRIST's ſufferings, that when his " glory ſhall be revealed, they alſo may be glad " with exceeding joy," 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. I proceed to a SERM. CXXVII.

Third obſervation, which is the different eſtate of good and bad men after this life; " Lazarus died, " and was carried by the angels into Abraham's " boſom: the rich man died, and went to hell." This the juſtice of divine providence ſeems to require; ſo that if there had been no revelation of GOD to this purpoſe, it is a thing very credible to natural reaſon, whether we conſider GOD or our ſelves. If we conſider GOD, our reaſon tells us, that he is the holy and righteous governor of the world, and conſequently, that he loves goodneſs and hates ſin, and therefore is concern'd to countenance the one, and diſcountenance the other, in ſuch a ſolemn and publick manner, as may vindicate his holineſs and juſtice to the world. Now the diſpenſations of his providence are promiſcuous in this world; and therefore it ſeems very reaſonable, that there ſhould be a general aſſize, a fair and open trial; when " GOD will render to every man accord- " ing to his works."

And if we conſider ourſelves, this will appear very credible; for this has been the conſtant opinion, not only of the common people, but of the wiſeſt perſons, who had only the light of nature to guide them. Nay, if we do but ſearch our own conſciences, we ſhall find an inward and ſecret acknowledgment of this, in that inward peace and ſatisfaction we find in any good action, and in that

SERM. CXXVII.

ſhame and fear and horror that haunts a man after the commiſſion of any, tho' never ſo ſecret a ſin.

And as reaſon and ſcripture together do aſſure us of a future judgment; ſo likewiſe, that men, when they paſs out of this world, ſhall meet with the proper conſequences and rewards of their actions in the other. And tho' the happineſs or miſery of men be not ſo compleat as it ſhall be after the publick judgment; yet it is unſpeakably great. Lazarus is repreſented as very happy immediately after his paſſing out of this world, he is ſaid to be "carried into Abraham's boſom;" by which the Jews expreſs the happineſs of the future ſtate. And the rich man is repreſented, as in great anguiſh and torment. But what the happineſs of good men, and the miſery of wicked men ſhall be in the other ſtate, we can but now imperfectly and unskilfully deſcribe. Each of theſe I have in another diſcourſe * ſpoken ſomething to. I proceed to a

Fourth obſervation, the vaſt difference between mens conditions in this world, and the other. The rich man proſpered here, and was afterwards tormented: Lazarus was poor and miſerable in this world, and happy in the other; ver. 25. "Remember that thou in thy life-time receivedſt thy "good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now "he is comforted, and thou art tormented." And it is very agreeable to the wiſdom of GOD, to make ſuch a difference between mens conditions in this world and the other; and that for theſe two reaſons.

1ſt, for the trying of mens virtue.

* *Sermon* CLXIII *on Rom.* vi. 21, 22.

2dly,

2dly, in order to the recompenſing of it.

1. For the trial of mens virtue. For this end principally GOD ordains the ſufferings of good men, and permits the beſt of his ſervants many times to be involved in the greateſt calamities, to try their faith in him, and love to him; to improve their virtue, and to prevent thoſe ſins into which the mighty temptations of a perpetual proſperity are apt to draw even the beſt of men; to take off their affections from the love of this vain world, and to engage and fix them there, where they ſhall never repent that they have placed them; to prove their ſincerity towards GOD, and to exerciſe their patience and ſubmiſſion to his will; to prepare them for the glory of the next life, and to make the happineſs of heaven more welcome to them, when they ſhall come to it.

2dly, in order to the recompenſing of men: that they who will take up with the pleaſures and enjoyments of this preſent world, and take no care for their future ſtate, that they who will gratify their ſenſes, and neglect their immortal ſouls, may inherit the proper conſequences of their wretched choice. And on the other hand, that they who love GOD above all things, and had rather endure the greateſt evils, than do the leaſt, that they who look beyond the preſent ſcene of things, and believe the reality and eternity of the other ſtate, and live accordingly, may not be diſappointed in their hopes, and ſerve GOD and ſuffer for him for nothing. From this conſideration of the difference between the condition of men in this world and the other, we may infer,

SERM. CXXVII.

1. That no man ſhould meaſure his felicity or unhappineſs by his lot in this world. If thou receiveſt thy good things, art rich and honourable, and haſt as much of the things of this world as thine heart can wiſh, art ſplendidly attired, and "fareſt ſumptuouſly every day;" art "in no trouble "like other men, neither art plagued like other "folk;" do not upon this bleſs thyſelf as the happy man. On the other hand, art thou poor and miſerable, deſtitute of all the conveniences and accommodations of this life? do not repine at thy lot, and murmur at GOD for having dealt hardly with thee. No man can be pronounced happy or miſerable for what befals him in this life; "no "man knows love or hatred by theſe things;" this life is but a ſhort and inconſiderable duration, and it matters not much what entertainment we meet withal, as we are paſſing through this world: the ſtate of eternity is that wherein the happineſs or miſery of men ſhall be determined. He is the happy man who is ſo in that life which ſhall never have an end; and he is miſerable that ſhall be ſo for ever.

2. We ſhould not ſet too great a value upon the bleſſings of this life. We may "receive our "good things" here, and "be tormented" hereafter; nay, this very thing will be no inconſiderable part of our torment, none of the leaſt aggravations of our miſery, that we "did receive our good "things." Nothing afflicts a man more, and toucheth him more ſenſibly when he is in miſery, than the remembrance of his former proſperity; had he never been happy, his miſery would be the leſs.

Therefore we ſhould be ſo far from applauding our ſelves in the proſperity of this world, that we ſhould

ſhould rather be afraid of "receiving our good "things" here; leſt GOD ſhould put us off with theſe things, and this ſhould be all our portion, and leſt our miſery in the next world be the greater for our having been happy.

The felicities of this world are tranſient, and tho' our happineſs were never ſo compleat, yet it is going off, and paſſing away; and when it is gone and paſt, if miſery ſucceed it, it had better never have been. "Remember, thou in thy life-time re- "ceived'ſt thy good things;" theſe things are only for our life-time, and how ſhort is that! did men ſeriouſly conſider this, they would not ſet ſuch a price upon any of the tranſient enjoyments of this life, as for the ſake of them to neglect the great concernments of another world. We are apt to be dazzled with the preſent glittering of worldly glory and proſperity: but if we would look upon theſe things as they will be ſhortly gone from us, how little would they ſignify! the rich man here in the parable did, no doubt, think himſelf a much happier man than poor Lazarus that lay at his door; and yet after a little while how glad would he have been to have changed conditions with this poor man! when he was "in torments," then no doubt he wiſh'd that he had ſuffered all the miſery and want in this world which Lazarus did, provided he might have been comforted as he was, and "car- "ried by angels into Abraham's boſom." We ſhould value this world, and look upon it, as this rich man did, not when he enjoyed it, but when he was taken from it; and we ſhould eſteem it, and uſe it while we may, as he wiſh'd he had done when it was too late.

3. We

SERM. CXXVII.

3. We should not be excessively troubled if we meet with hardship and affliction here in this world; because those whom GOD designs for the greatest happiness hereafter, may receive evil things here. Thus our blessed SAVIOUR, "the captain of "our salvation, was made perfect through suffer- "ings;" this was the method which GOD used towards his own SON, first "he suffered, and then "entred into glory." He suffered more than any of us can bear; and yet he supported himself under all his sufferings by the consideration of the glory that would follow; "for the joy that was set before "him, he endured the cross, and despised the "shame."

The same consideration should arm us with patience and constancy under the greatest evils of this life. The evils that we lie under are passing and going off; but the happiness is to come. And if the happiness of the next world were no greater, nor of longer continuance, than the miseries of this world; or if they did equally answer one another; yet a wise man would choose to have misery first, and his happiness last. For if his happiness were first, all the pleasure and comfort of it would be eaten out by dismal apprehensions of what was to follow: but his sufferings, if they were first, would be sweetned by the consideration of his future happiness; and the bitterness of his sufferings would give a quicker relish to his happiness when it should come, and make it greater.

But a good man under the sufferings of this life, hath not only this comfort, that his happiness is to come, but likewise that it shall be infinitely greater than his sufferings; that these are but short, but that

that ſhall never have an end. And this was that which fortified the firſt chriſtians againſt all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do againſt them. They thought themſelves well paid, if "through many tribulations they might at laſt "enter into the kingdom of GOD;" becauſe they believed that the joys of the next life would abundantly recompenſe all their labours and ſufferings in this world. They expected a mighty reward far beyond all their ſufferings; they were firmly perſuaded that they ſhould be vaſt gainers at the laſt. So the apoſtle tells us of himſelf, Rom. viii. 18. "I "reckon that the ſufferings of this preſent time "are not worthy to be compared with the glory "that ſhall be revealed." And to the ſame purpoſe, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. "Our light afflictions, "which are but for a moment, work for us an "eternal weight of glory, whilſt we look not at "the things which are ſeen, but at the things which "are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are "temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are "eternal." If we would conſider all things together, and fix our eyes as much upon the happineſs and glory of the next world, as upon the pomp and ſplendor of this; if we would look as much at "the things which are not ſeen, as the things "which are ſeen," we ſhould eaſily perceive, that he who ſuffers in this world does not renounce his happineſs, only puts it out to intereſt, upon terms of the greateſt advantage.

4. We ſhould do all things with a regard to our future and eternal ſtate. It matters not much what our condition is in this world, becauſe that's to continue but for a little while: but we ought to have

SERM. CXXVII.

have a great and ſerious regard to that ſtate that never ſhall have an end. Therefore whenever we are doing any thing, we ſhould conſider what influence ſuch an action will have upon the happineſs or miſery of the next life. We ſhould meaſure every action and every condition of our lives by the reference of them to eternity. To be rich and great in this world will contribute nothing to our future happineſs; all theſe things which we ſo much dote upon, and purſue with ſo much eagerneſs, will not commend any man to GOD; they will ſignify nothing when we come to appear before our judge. Death will ſtrip us of theſe things, and in the other world, the ſoul of the pooreſt man that ever lived ſhall be upon equal terms with the richeſt. Nothing but holineſs and virtue will then avail us; and it is but a little while and we ſhall all certainly be of this mind, that the beſt thing men can do in this world, is to provide for the other. I proceed to a

Fifth obſervation, that the ſtate of men in the next world is fixt and unchangeable; which I ground upon ver. 26. "Between us and you "there is a great gulf fixt, ſo that they that would "paſs from hence to you cannot, neither can they paſs "to us that would come from thence". By which words our SAVIOUR ſeems not only to intend, that they that are in heaven and hell can have no communication and intercourſe with one another; but likewiſe that they are lodg'd in an immutable ſtate. Thoſe that are happy are like to continue ſo; and thoſe that are miſerable are immutably fixt in that ſtate.

1. As to thoſe that are in happineſs there can be no great doubt. For what can tempt men that have

have so narrowly escap'd the dangers and temptations of a wicked world, and are possest of so great a happiness by the free grace and mercy of GOD, to do any thing whereby they may forfeit their happiness; or so much as to entertain a thought of offending that GOD, to whom they cannot but be sensible how infinitely they are obliged? In this imperfect state few men have so little goodness as to sin without temptation; but in that state where men are perfectly good, and can have no temptation to be otherwise, it is not imaginable that they should fall from that state.

2. As to the state of the damned, that that likewise is immutable the scripture does seem plainly enough to assert, when it calls it "an everlasting destruction from the presence of the LORD," and uses such expressions to set forth the continuance of their misery, as signify the longest and most interminable duration, expressions of as great an extent as those which are used to signify the eternal happiness of the blessed; and as large and unlimited, as any are to be had in those languages wherein the scriptures are written.

Besides that wicked men in the other world are in scripture represented as in the same condition with the devils, of whom there is no ground to believe that any of them ever did or will repent. Not because repentance is impossible in its own nature to those that are in extreme misery; but because there is no place left for it. Being under an irreversible doom, there is no encouragement to repentance, no hope of mercy and pardon, without which repentance is impossible. For if a man did utterly despair of pardon, and were assured upon good

SERM. CXXVII

ground, that GOD would never ſhew mercy to him, in this caſe a man would grow deſperate, and not care what he did. He that knows whatever he does, he is miſerable and undone, will not matter how he demeans himſelf. All motives to repentance are gone after a man once knows it will be to no purpoſe. And this the ſcripture ſeems to repreſent to us, as the caſe of the devils and damned ſpirits. Becauſe their ſtate is finally determined, and they are concluded under an irreverſible ſentence, therefore repentance is impoſſible to them.

Sorry, no doubt, they are, and heartily troubled that by their own ſin and folly they have brought this miſery upon themſelves, and they cannot but conceive an everlaſting diſpleaſure againſt themſelves, for having been the cauſe and authors of their own ruin; and the reflexion of this will be a perpetual ſpring of diſcontent, and fill their minds with eternal rage and vexation; and ſo long as they feel the intolerable puniſhments of ſin, and grone under the inſupportable torments of it, and ſee no end of this miſerable ſtate, no hope of getting out of it, they can be no otherwiſe affected, than with diſcontent to themſelves, and rage and fury againſt GOD.

They are indeed penitent ſo far as to be troubled at themſelves for what they have done; but this trouble works no change and alteration in them; they ſtill hate GOD who inflicts theſe puniſhments upon them, and who they believe is determined to continue them in this miſerable ſtate. The preſent anguiſh of their condition, and their deſpair of bettering it, makes them mad; and their minds are ſo diſtracted by the wildneſs of their paſſions, and their

their spirits so exasperated and set on fire by their own giddy motions, that there can be no rest and silence in their souls not so much as the liberty of one calm and sedate thought. SERM. CXXVII.

Or if at any time they reflect upon the evil of their sins, and should entertain any thoughts of returning to GOD and their duty, they are presently checkt with this consideration, that their case is determined, that GOD is implacably offended with them, and is inexorably and peremptorily resolved to make them miserable for ever; and during this persuasion, no man can return to the love of GOD and goodness, without which there can be no repentance.

This consideration, of the immutable state of men after this life, should engage us with all seriousness and diligence to endeavour to secure our future happiness. GOD hath "set before us good "and evil, life and death," and we may yet choose which we please; but in the other world, we must stand to that choice which we have made here, and inherit the consequences of it.

By sin mankind is brought into a miserable state; but our condition is not desperate and past remedy. GOD hath sent his SON "to be a PRINCE and "a SAVIOUR, to give repentance and remission of "sins." So that tho' our case be bad, it need not continue so, if it be not our own fault. There is a possibility now of changing our condition for the better, and of laying the foundation of a perpetual happiness for our selves. The grace of GOD calls upon us, and is ready to assist us; so that no man's case is so bad, but there is a possibility of bettering it, if we be not wanting to our selves, and will make

SERM. CXXVII.

uſe of the grace which GOD offers, who is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men. Under the influence and aſſiſtance of this grace, thoſe who are "dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, may paſs from "death to life," may be "turned from darkneſs "to light, and from the power of Satan unto "GOD." So long as we are in this world there is a poſſibility of being tranſlated from one ſtate to another, from the "dominion of Satan into the "kingdom of GOD's dear SON." But if we neglect the opportunities of this life, and ſtand out againſt the offers of GOD's grace and mercy, there will no overtures be made to us in the other world. After this life is ended, GOD will try us no more; our final miſcarriage in this world will prove fatal to us in the other, and we ſhall not be permitted to live over again to correct our errors. "As the tree falls, ſo it ſhall lie;" ſuch a ſtate as we are ſettled in, when we go out of this world, ſhall be fixt in the other, and there will be no poſſibility of changing it. We are yet in the hand of our own counſel, and by GOD's grace we may mould and faſhion our own fortune. But if we trifle away this advantage, we ſhall "fall into the "hands of the living GOD," out of which there is no redemption. GOD hath yet left heaven and hell to our choice, and we had need to look about us, and chooſe well, who can chooſe but once for all and for ever. There is yet a ſpace and opportunity left us of repentance; but ſo ſoon as we ſtep out of this life, and are entred upon the other world, our condition will be ſealed, never to be reverſt. And becauſe after this life there will be no further hopes of mercy, there will be no poſſibility of repentance.

"This

SERM. CXXVII.

" This is the accepted time, this is the day of sal-
" vation; therefore to-day if ye will hear his voice,
" harden not your hearts; lest GOD swear in his
" wrath that we shall not enter into his rest." I proceed to a

Sixth observation, that a standing revelation of GOD is evidence sufficient for divine things. " They have Moses, and the prophets, let them " hear them;" that is, they have the books of Moses and the prophets, written by men divinely inspired, these do sufficiently declare to them the will of GOD and their duty; and it is unreasonable to demand or expect that GOD should do more for their conviction and satisfaction.

I know very well the text speaks only of the scriptures of the old testament, those of the new being not then extant when this parable was deliver'd. But what is here said concerning the scriptures of the old testament, is equally applicable to the new; and tho' Abraham do only recommend Moses and the prophets, there is no doubt but he would have said the same concerning CHRIST and his apostles, if the books of the new testament had been then extant. So that what I shall say upon this observation, does indifferently concern the whole scripture.

And that I may make out this observation more fully, I shall take these five things into consideration.

1st, what we are to understand by a divine revelation.

2dly, give a brief account of the several kinds of it.

3dly, shew

SERM. CXXVII.

3dly, ſhew what advantage this ſtanding revelation of the ſcriptures hath above any other way of conveying the will of GOD to the world.

4thly, that there is ſufficient evidence for the divinity of the ſcriptures.

5thly, that it is unreaſonable to expect that GOD ſhould do more for our conviction, than to afford ſuch a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will. I ſhall go over theſe as briefly as I can. I begin with the

1ſt, what we are to underſtand by a divine revelation. By a divine revelation we are to underſtand "a ſupernatural diſcovery, or manifeſtation of "any thing to us;" I ſay, "ſupernatural," becauſe it may either be immediately by GOD; or by the mediation of angels, as moſt, if not all the revelations of the old teſtament were. "A ſuper-"natural diſcovery or manifeſtation," either immediately to our minds, by our underſtandings and inward faculties; (for I do not ſo well underſtand the diſtinction between underſtanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it,) or elſe mediately to our underſtandings by the mediation of our outward ſenſes, as by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and ſound to the ſenſe of hearing. "A diſcovery or manifeſtation "of a thing," whether it be ſuch as cannot be known at all by the uſe of our natural reaſon and underſtandings; or ſuch as may be diſcovered by natural light, but is more clearly revealed or made known, or we are awakened to a more particular and attentive conſideration of it. For it is not at all unſuitable to the wiſdom of GOD, to make a ſupernatural diſcovery to us of ſuch things as may be

be known by the light of nature, either to give us a clearer manifeſtation of ſuch truths as were more obſcurely known, and did as it were lie buried in our underſtandings; or elſe to quicken our minds to a more ſerious and lively conſideration of thoſe truths. SERM. CXXVII.

2dly, for the ſeveral kinds of divine revelations. That they were various, the apoſtle to the Hebrews tells us, chap. i. 1. "GOD who at ſundry "times, and in divers manners, ſpake to the fa- "thers by the prophets;" where by prophets we are to underſtand not only thoſe who did foretel future things; but any perſon that was divinely inſpired, and to whom GOD was pleaſed to make any ſupernatural diſcovery of himſelf.

Now the ſeveral kinds of revelation taken notice of by the Jews, are viſions; dreams; propheſy; oracle; inſpiration, or that which we call the HOLY GHOST; voice *Bath-col*; or that which was the higheſt of all, which they call *gradus Moſaicus*, the degree of revelation which was peculiar to Moſes. The Jewiſh writers, eſpecially Maimonides, have many ſubtle obſervations about the differences of theſe ſeveral kinds of revelation, which depend upon ſubtle and philoſophical diſtinctions of the faculties of perception; as that ſome of theſe revelations were by impreſſion only upon the underſtanding; ſome only upon the imagination; ſome upon both; ſome upon the outward ſenſes; but the ſimple and plain difference between them, ſo far as there is any ground in ſcripture to diſtinguiſh them, ſeems to be this; viſion was a repreſentation of ſomething to a man, when he was waking, in oppoſition to dreams, which were repreſentations made to men

in

SERM. CXXVII.

in their ſleep. Propheſy might be either dream or viſion, and the Jews obſerve that it was always one of theſe two ways, which they grounded upon Numb. xii. 6. "If there be a prophet among you. "I the LORD will make myſelf known to him in "a viſion, and will ſpeak unto him in a dream." But propheſy in the ſtrict notion of it, had this peculiarly belonging to it, that it was not only monitory or inſtructive, but did foretel ſome event of concernment to others; and the Jewiſh doctors tell us, that it was a clearer revelation, and carried a greater aſſurance along with it, and that this was common to all the three, that there was ſomething of extaſy and tranſport of mind in all theſe.

The fourth ſort of revelation, which was by oracle, which is call'd Urim and Thummim, was a rendering of anſwers to queſtions, by the high-prieſt looking upon the ſtones in the breaſt-plate, which how it was done, is uncertain.

The fifth ſort of revelation is that which they call the HOLY GHOST, which was a more calm and gentle inſpiration, without any extraordinary tranſport of mind or extaſy; ſuch as David had in the writing of the pſalms.

The loweſt of all was that which they call'd *Bath-col*, which was by a voice from heaven; and this is the way of revelation, which the Jews obſerved did only continue among them from the days of the prophet Malachi to our SAVIOUR.

The higheſt of all was that which they call'd *gradus Moſaicus*, to which the Jews give ſeveral prerogatives above all the other ways of revelation;

as

as that is was done by impreſſion merely upon the underſtanding, without extaſy, or rapture, or tranſport, when he was waking, and in his ordinary temper, and his ſenſes not bound up either by extaſy or ſleep, that it was a revelation immediately from GOD himſelf, and not by the mediation of angels, without any fear, or amazement, or fainting, which was incident to other prophets; and the ſpirit of propheſy reſted upon him, and he could exert it arbitrarily, and put it forth when he would. Of which thus much is evidently true from the ſtory of him, that the ſpirit of propheſy did reſt more conſtantly upon him, and that he could exert it with greater freedom, and without any diſcernible amazement or tranſport from his ordinary temper. But that it was by impreſſion merely upon his underſtanding, as that is a diſtinct faculty from the imagination, is not ſo certain: that it was always by an immediate communication from GOD, without the mediation of angels, ſeems not to be true; for St. Stephen tells us, that "the law was "given by the diſpoſition of angels," Acts vii. 53. And St. Paul that "it was ordained by the angels "in the hand of a mediator," that is Moſes, Gal. iii. 19. But that the revelation which was made to him, had ſome ſingular prerogatives above thoſe of other prophets, is plain from ſcripture, Numb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 8. when Aaron and Miriam contended with Moſes as being equal to him, GOD tells them that there was a vaſt difference between him and other prophets; "hear now my words, if there "be a prophet among you, I the LORD will "make myſelf known unto him in a viſion, and "will ſpeak unto him in a dream. My ſervant

7.

SERM. CXXVII.

" Moſes is not ſo.— With him will I ſpeak mouth " to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark " ſpeeches, &c." Exod. xxxiii. 11. " And the " LORD ſpake unto Moſes face to face, as a man " ſpeaketh unto his friend." Deut. xxxiv. 10. " And there aroſe not a prophet ſince in Iſrael " like unto Moſes, whom the LORD knew face to " face." All which ſignify at leaſt this, that GOD made the cleareſt, and moſt familiar, and moſt perfect diſcoveries to Moſes of any of the prophets; only our LORD JESUS CHRIST, by whom GOD hath diſcovered his will to us under the new teſtament, did excel Moſes; Moſes being but " a faith- " ful ſervant," that is, *humilis amicus*, a meaner ſort of friend; but " the LORD JESUS CHRIST, " the only begotten SON of GOD," who came from " the boſom of his FATHER," and was intimately acquainted with the ſecrets of his will, and " had " not the SPIRIT given him by meaſure," but the moſt plentiful effuſion of it, being " anointed " above his fellows."

Now theſe being the ſeveral ſorts and degrees of revelation, which GOD hath made of himſelf to the world, the holy ſcriptures are a ſyſtem or collection of theſe, the authentick inſtruments or record, by which the things revealed any of theſe ways, are tranſmitted to us, and is therefore called " the " word of GOD," as containing thoſe things which GOD in ſeveral ages hath ſpoken to the world; that is, matters of divine revelation, which are neceſſary to be known by men, in order to their eternal happineſs. And this being now the great and ſtanding revelation of GOD, which is to continue to the end of the world, I intend to limit my

my discourse solely to this, as being the only revelation which we are concerned to enquire after. SERM. CXXVII.

And therefore in the third place, to shew you what advantage this standing revelation of the scriptures hath above private revelations made to particular persons, and frequently repeated and renewed in several ages; that so it may appear both agreeable to the wisdom of GOD to settle revelations in this way, as being more commodious; and likewise to his goodness, it being a real privilege which these latter ages of the world enjoy, that they have a more fixt and certain way of being acquainted with the will of GOD, than those ages had, which were govern'd by such private revelations, as were now and then made to particular persons. And the advantages are these.

1. It is a most certain way of conveyance of things, and more secure and free from imposture. Suppose a revelation made to a particular person, which is of general concernment, that this may have a general and lasting effect, he must impart it to others, as many as he can, and give them the best assurance he can of it; and these must relate it to others; and so it must pass from hand to hand, to be delivered from parents to their children. Now this way of conveying a revelation by oral report, must needs be liable to many uncertainties, both by involuntary mistakes, through weakness of memory or understanding; and wilful falsifications and impostures, out of malice and design. So that the effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be large nor lasting, it can but reach a few persons, and continue a little while in its full credibility; and the farther it goes, the weaker, like

SERM. CXXVII.

circles made in water, which the more they enlarge themſelves, and the longer they continue the leſs diſcernible they are, 'till at length they quite diſappear. Whereas being once recorded by perſons ſecured from error by ſupernatural and divine aſſiſtance, they are not liable to thoſe eaſy falſifications or miſtakes, which traditional reports and relations are neceſſarily, thro' human malice or weakneſs, liable to.

2. It is a more general and univerſal way of conveyance; which is evident from the common experience of the world, who have pitched upon this way of writing things in books, as that which doth moſt eaſily convey the knowledge and notice of things to the generality of men.

3. It is a more uniform way of conveyance; that is, things that are once written and propagated that way, lie equally open to all, and come in a manner with equal credit to all; it being not morally impoſſible that a common book, that paſſeth through all hands, and which is of vaſt importance and concernment, ſhould be liable to any material corruption, without a general conſpiracy and agreement, which cannot be, but that it muſt be generally known. So that conſidering the commonneſs, and univerſal concernment of this book of the ſcriptures, all men are in a manner equally, that is, every man is ſufficiently and competently aſſured of the credit of it; that is, that we are not in any material thing impoſed upon by falſe copies. But in traditional revelation it is quite otherwiſe; tradition being a very unequal and ununiform way of conveyance. For ſeeing it may be of general concernment, and all cannot have it at the firſt hand, that is, immediately from him

to

to whom it was made; but ſome at the ſecond, others at the third, fourth, or fifth hand, or much further off; the credit of it will be neceſſarily weakned by every remove. A report that comes through many hands, being like the argument we call induction; and as the ſtrength and goodneſs of that depends upon the truth of every one of thoſe inſtances that make it up, ſo that if any of them fail, the whole argument is naught; ſo the credit of a report that paſſeth through twenty hands, depends upon the integrity and ſufficiency of all the relators, and whatever there is either of falſhood and malice, or of incapacity of underſtanding, or frailty of memory in any of the relators, ſo much of weakneſs is derived into the report or teſtimony; and conſequently the aſſurance which we can have of a private revelation, which is deliver'd traditionally through a great many perſons, muſt needs be very unequal.

4. It is a more laſting way of conveyance. Which likewiſe appears by experience, we having now nothing at all of the hiſtory of ancient times, but what is conveyed down to us in writing.

5. It is a more humane way of conveyance, which requires leſs of miracle and ſupernatural interpoſition for the preſervation of it. This book of the ſcriptures may with ordinary humane care be tranſmitted intire, and free from any material error, to all ſucceeding ages: but revelations unwritten, if they have any laſting and conſiderable effect, they muſt at leaſt in every age be renewed and repeated; otherwiſe in a very ſhort ſpace, either through the unfaithfulneſs, or careleſneſs and frailty of men, they

SERM. CXXVII.

they will either be quite loſt, or ſo corrupted and depraved, that they will ſignify nothing.

From all which it appears, that we have ſo little cauſe to murmur aud repine at the providence of GOD, which in theſe latter ages of the world does not make thoſe more immediate diſcoveries and manifeſtations of himſelf to us, that he did to former ages, that we have rather great reaſon to admire the wiſdom and goodneſs of GOD's providence, which hath privileged us with this ſtanding revelation of his written word, which hath ſo many ways the advantage of frequent and extraordinary revelation, and in reſpect of the generality of mankind, is much more uſeful and effectual to its end. I know there are ſome that have endeavour'd to perſuade the world, that doctrines may much better be preſerved by common rumour and report, than by writing and record; but I hope there is no man ſo deſtitute of common ſenſe as to believe them contrary to the experience of all men.

I come now to the fourth thing I propos'd to be conſider'd; namely, that there is ſufficient evidence of the divinity of the ſcriptures. By the divinity of the ſcriptures, I mean, that they were revealed by GOD, and that the things contained in them were not invented by men, but diſcovered to men by GOD; and that the penmen of theſe books did not write their own private conceptions, but were inſpired by the HOLY GHOST. Now if we can be ſatisfy'd of this, we ought to receive the ſcriptures with the ſame reverence, as if an angel from heaven ſhould declare theſe things unto us, or as if GOD ſhould immediately reveal them

to

to our minds; for nothing can come with greater authority than this, that we believe it to be revealed by GOD; and provided we be assured of this, it matters not which way; the thing hath the same authority. SERM. CXXVII.

Now that we have sufficient evidence of the divinity of the scriptures, will best appear, by considering what is sufficient to give authority to a book, so that no prudent or reasonable man can question, but that the book was writ by him whose name it bears. For what evidence we would accept of for the authority of other books, we must not refuse in this case for the scriptures; if we do, we deal unequally, and it is a sign that we do not want evidence for the authority of the scriptures, but that we have no mind to believe them.

Now the utmost authority that any book is capable of, is, that it hath been transmitted down to us by the general and uncontroll'd testimony of all ages, and that the authority of it was never questioned in that age wherein it was written, nor invalidated ever since.

And this evidence we have for the authority of the scriptures. As for the old testament, I shall not now labour in the proof of that by arguments proper to it self, but shall take the divinity of them upon the authority of the new, which, if it be proved, is sufficient evidence for it, tho' there were no other.

Now for the scriptures of the new testament, I desire but these two things to be granted to me at first.

1. That all were written by those persons whose names they bear: and for this we have as much authority

SERM. CXXVII.

authority as for any books in the world, and so much as may satisfy men in other cases, and therefore not to be rejected in this.

2. That those who wrote those books were men of integrity, and did not wilfully falsify in any thing; and this cannot reasonably be denied, because these very persons gave the utmost evidence that men could give of their integrity. The highest attestation that any man can give of the truth of what he relates, is to lay down his life for the testimony of it; and this the apostles did.

Now if this be granted, that they did not falsify in their relations concerning the miracles of CHRIST, and his resurrection, and the miraculous gifts which were bestowed upon the apostles after his ascension; this is as great an evidence as the world can give, and as the thing is capable of, that our SAVIOUR was "a teacher come from GOD," and that the apostles were extraordinarily assisted by the HOLY GHOST; and if this be granted, what can be desired more to prove the divinity of their writings?

But it may be said, that tho' the apostles were granted to be men of integrity, and that they did not wilfully falsify in their relations, yet they might be mistaken about those matters. But that they were not, we have as much evidence as can be for any thing of this nature, namely, that the things which are related are plain sensible matters of fact, about which no man need mistake, unless he will; and they did not write things upon the report of others, who might possibly have designs to deceive, but upon the surest evidence in the world, their own knowledge, and the testimony of their senses; "the

" the things that we have ſeen and heard teſtify we " unto you." So that if they were miſtaken in theſe things, no man can be ſure of any thing; and by the ſame reaſon that we disbelieve the authority of the ſcriptures upon this account, we muſt believe nothing at all. This is in ſhort the whole force of the argument for the divinity of the ſcriptures, which I might have enlarged infinitely upon; but I deſign now only briefly to repreſent to you, that we, who live at the diſtance of ſo many ages from the time of this revelation, are not deſtitute of ſufficient evidence for the authority of the ſcriptures, and ſuch evidence, as they who reject in other caſes, are eſteemed unreaſonable. SERM. CXXVII.

I ſhould come now to the

5th, and laſt thing, namely, that it is unreaſonable to expect, that GOD ſhould do more for our conviction, than to afford us a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will, ſuch as the books of the holy ſcriptures are. But this I ſhall refer to another opportunity, in a particular diſcourſe upon the 31ſt verſe, which contains the main deſign, the ſum, and ſubſtance of this whole parable.

SERMON CXXVIII.

The parable of the rich man, and Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 31.

If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.

SERM. CXXVIII. The third ſermon on this text. Preach'd at whitehall, anno 1678.

THESE words are the concluſion of that excellent parable of our SAVIOUR concerning the rich man and Lazarus, and they are the final anſwer which Abraham gives to the rich man's laſt requeſt; who being in great torment, and not able to obtain any eaſe for himſelf, is repreſented as concerned for his relations, whom he had left behind him upon earth; leſt they alſo by their own careleſneſs and folly ſhould plunge themſelves into the ſame miſery that he was in, and therefore he begs of Abraham, that he would "ſend "Lazarus to his father's houſe," where he had "five brethren, that he might teſtify unto them, "leſt they alſo ſhould come to that place of tor-"ment." To which requeſt Abraham anſwers, that there was no neceſſity of ſuch an extraordinary courſe to be uſed towards thoſe who had ſufficient means of conviction ſo near at hand, if they would but hearken to them, and make uſe of them. "Abraham ſaith unto him, they have Moſes and "the prophets; let them hear them."

But the rich man preſſeth his requeſt further, upon this reaſon, that they might not perhaps be moved

moved by Moſes and the prophets, nay it was likely they would not be moved by them; for they had always [had them, and yet they remained impenitent: but if a ſpecial meſſenger ſhould be ſent to them from the dead, this certainly could not fail to awaken them, and bring them to repentance, ver. 30. "And he ſaid, nay, father Abraham, but "if one went unto them from the dead, they will "repent." To which Abraham makes this peremptory reply, "if they hear not Moſes and the "prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, tho' one "roſe from the dead."

In which words Abraham abſolutely denies that there is any ſuch probability, much leſs certainty that thoſe who reject a publick credible revelation of GOD, ſuch as that of the holy ſcripture is, ſhould be effectually convinced by a meſſenger from the dead. And our SAVIOUR brings in Abraham delivering himſelf very poſitively in this matter, and therefore we may preſume it to be our SAVIOUR's own ſenſe, and may rely upon it for a truth; which however at firſt ſight it may not be ſo evident, yet I hope in the progreſs of this diſcourſe to make it ſufficiently clear.

But before I undertake that, I ſhall premiſe a caution or two to prevent all miſtake in this matter.

Firſt, that we are not to underſtand theſe words too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, as if the thing were ſimply and in it ſelf impoſſible, that a man who is not convinced by hearing or reading Moſes and the prophets, ſhould be brought to repentance any other way. For it is very poſſible in the nature of the thing, yea, and likely enough, that a man who is

SERM. CXXVIII

not convinced by calm evidence and perſuaſion, may yet be very much wrought upon by a ſtrange and amazing accident; and if one, whom he had known when he was alive, ſhould appear to him from the dead, and declare the certainty of a future ſtate, and the condition of things in another world, there is little doubt to be made, but that this would more rouze and awaken him to conſider his danger, than all the threatnings of GOD's word; and 'tis very poſſible that by the concurrence of GOD's grace, this might prove an effectual means to convince ſuch a man, and to bring him to repentance. And yet for all this, it is not probable upon the whole matter, and if all circumſtances be duly conſider'd, that this ſhould generally have a permanent effect upon men, ſo as throughly to reclaim ſuch perſons as do obſtinately reſiſt the light and counſels of GOD's word.

Secondly, another caution I would give is this, that we are not to underſtand theſe words ſo, as to weaken the force of that argument from miracles for the proof and confirmation of a divine doctrine, as if our SAVIOUR intended to inſinuate, that miracles are not a proper and ſufficient argument to convince men. For our SAVIOUR does not here oppoſe Moſes and the prophets to a miraculous teſtimony; but he advanceth the publick evidence and teſtimony which Moſes and the prophets had above the evidence of a ſingle and private miracle; for Moſes and the prophets had their confirmation from miracles; and miracles are the great evidence and atteſtation which GOD hath always given to the divinity of any perſon or doctrine; and therefore Abraham cannot be thought

to

to speak any thing to the prejudice of miracles, when he says, "if they hear not Moses and the "prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' "one rose from the dead." Nay, so far is he from that, that this reasoning of his is rather for the advantage of miracles. For Moses and the prophets had the confirmation of many and great, of publick and unquestionable miracles; a credible relation whereof was conveyed down to after-ages. So that if rational means of conviction were the thing desired, it was not likely that those, who were not persuaded by Moses and the prophets, which were acknowledged by themselves to have had the confirmation of so many undoubted miracles, should in reason be convinced by a private and single miracle. SERM. CXXVIII

These considerations being premised by way of caution, I come now to make out the truth of what is here asserted in the text. And for the full clearing of this matter, I shall speak to these two propositions.

First, That it is unreasonable to expect that GOD should do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a standing revelation of his mind and will; such as that of the holy scriptures is. And if so, then

Secondly, that upon the whole matter it is very improbable, that those who reject this publick revelation of GOD, should be effectually convinced, tho' one should speak to them from the dead.

First, that it is unreasonable to expect that GOD should do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a standing revelation of his mind and will; such as that of the holy scriptures is. This is strongly

SERM. CXXVIII

ſtrongly implied in Abraham's firſt anſwer, " they " have Moſes, and the prophets, let them hear " them ;" as if he had ſaid, having ſuch means of conviction ſo near at hand, why ſhould they deſire and expect any other ? It is in this caſe of the ſcriptures, as in that of GOD's providence ; GOD does not commonly prove his providence to men by extraordinary inſtances of his power, and by changing the courſe of nature, to convince every man in the world that he governs it : but by ſtanding teſtimonies of his wiſdom and power, and goodneſs ; by theſe GOD does ſufficiently ſatisfy conſiderate men of his government and care of the world ; and tho' he do ſeldom manifeſt himſelf in ſupernatural and extraordinary ways, yet he hath not left himſelf without a witneſs, by the conſtant courſe of nature, in the returns of day and night, in the revolutions of the ſeaſons of the year, " in that he gives us rain from " heaven and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with " food and gladneſs." and theſe ſtanding arguments of his providence, tho' they be not ſo much taken notice of becauſe they are ſo common, yet they are daily miracles, and we can hardly imagine greater, and we ſhould be ſtrangely amazed at them, but that they are ſo very frequent and familiar.

The caſe is the ſame as to divine revelation. GOD hath not thought fit to gratify the perverſe curioſity of men, by affording to every man a particular and immediate revelation of his mind and will : but he hath given us a ſtanding revelation, which at firſt had the greateſt and moſt miraculous confirmation, and he hath ſtill left us ſufficient means of being aſſured of the truth of this revelation, and of the confirmation that was at the

firſt

first given to it; and we tempt GOD, by demanding extraordinary signs, when we may receive so abundant satisfaction in an ordinary way. This being admitted, I shall proceed in the SERM. CXXVIII

Second place to shew, that it is upon the whole matter, and all circumstances consider'd, very improbable, that those who reject this publick revelation from GOD, should be effectually convinced, tho' one should speak to them from the dead. And this is that which is expresly asserted here in the text, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one "rose from the dead." Not but that any man would be very much startled and amazed, if one should come from the dead to warn him out of the danger of his wicked life; but yet for all that it is very unlikely that they who obstinately and perversely refuse to be convinced by Moses and the prophets, would be effectually persuaded (that is, so as to be brought to repentance and reformation of their lives) "tho' one should rise from the dead." And that for these reasons.

1. Because if such miracles were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all.

2. Men have as great or greater reason to believe the threatnings of GOD's word, as the discourse of one that should speak to them from the dead.

3. The very same reason which makes men to reject the counsels of GOD in his word, would in all probability hinder them from being convinced by a particular miracle.

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SERM. CXXVIII

4. Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince those who are obstinately addicted and wedded to their lusts.

5. An effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of GOD, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of GOD's grace, which there is no reason to expect either in an extraordinary way, or in an extraordinary degree, after men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means which GOD hath appointed to that end.

1. If such miracles as a special messenger from the dead to warn and admonish men, were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect upon men, and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all. For it is unreasonable at first sight, that the worst and most obstinate sort of sinners should expect this, as a peculiar favour and privilege to themselves, and that GOD should not do as much for others, who have deserved it more, and would probably make better use of it; and if these things were common, it is very probable that men would not be much moved by them. It may be while the apprehension of such a thing were fresh upon them, they would take up some good resolutions; as sinners usually do, while they are under present convictions of conscience, and the hand of GOD, by some great affliction or sickness, lies heavy upon them: but still they would be apt to defer their repentance, and put it off 'till the present amazement were a little over, and the terror of their

their first apprehensions were abated and worn off by degrees, and after a little while they would return to their former course. And this is too probable, from what we see men do in other cases not very much remote from this. It is a very terrible and amazing thing to see a man die, and solemnly take his last leave of the world. The very circumstances of dying men are apt to strike us with horror: to hear such a man how sensibly he will speak of the other world, as if he were just come from it, rather than going to it; how severely he will condemn himself for the folly and wickedness of his life; with what passion he will wish that he had lived better, and served GOD more sincerely; how seriously he will resolve upon a better life, if GOD would be pleased to raise him up, and try him but once more; with what zeal and earnestness he will commend to his best friends and nearest relations a religious and virtuous course of life, as the only thing that will minister comfort to them when they come to be in his condition. Such discourses as these are very apt to move and affect men for the time, and to stir up in them very good resolutions, whilst the present fit and impression lasts: but because these sights are very frequent, they have seldom any great and permanent effect upon men. Men consider that it is a very common case, and sinners take example and encouragement from one another; every one is affected for the present, but few are so effectually convinced, as to betake themselves to a better course. SERM. CXXVIII

SERM. CXXVIII

And if apparitions from the dead were as common as it is for men to die, we may reasonably presume that the discourses of dead and dying, of those that are going, and those who come from the dead, would have much the same effect upon the generality of men.

But if we suppose this a singular case, (which there is no reason to do) in that case the effect would probably be this; a man that were strongly addicted to his lusts, and had no mind to leave them, would be apt when the fright was over, to be easily persuaded that all this was merely the work of fancy and imagination; and the rather, because such things did not happen to others as well as to himself.

2. We have as great or greater reason to believe the warnings or threatnings of God's word, as the discourses of one that should come to us from the dead. For the threatnings of God's word against such sins as natural light convinceth men of, have the natural guilt and fears of men on their side, the particular testimony of every man's conscience, and the concurrent testimony of mankind to the probability of the thing; and to give us full assurance of the truth and reality of them, we have a credible relation of great and unquestionable miracles wrought on purpose to give testimony to those persons who denounced those threatnings, that they came from God. So that here is a very publick and authentick testimony given to the threatnings of God's word, more suitable to the generality of mankind, and of greater authority than a private apparition,

parition, or a single miracle; and if that will not convince men, why should we suppose that this will?

3. The very same reason which makes men to "reject the counsels of GOD" in his word, would, in all probability, hinder men from being convinced by an apparition from the dead. It is not generally for want of evidence, that men do not yield a full and effectual assent to the truth of GOD's word, I mean, that they do not believe it so as to obey it; but from the interest of some lust. The true cause is not in mens understandings, and because there is not reason enough to satisfy them, that the scriptures are the word of GOD: but in the obstinacy of their wills, which are enslaved to their lusts. And the disease being there, it is not to be cured by more evidence, but by more consideration, and by the grace of GOD, and better resolutions.

The man is addicted to some vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain those truths which would check and controul him in his course. The light of GOD's word is offensive to him, and therefore he would shut it out. This account our blessed SAVIOUR gives of the enmity of the Jews against him and his doctrine, John iii. 19. "Light is come into the world, and "men love darkness rather than light, because "their deeds are evil; for every one that doth "evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the "light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Upon the same account it is, that men resist the doctrine of the holy scriptures; not because they have sufficient

SERM. CXXVIII

ent reaſon to doubt of their divine authority; but becauſe they are unwilling to be govern'd by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book: for the wills of men have a great influence upon their underſtandings, to make aſſent eaſy or difficult; and as many are apt to aſſent to what they have a mind to, ſo they are ſlow to believe any thing which croſſeth their humours and inclinations; ſo that tho' greater evidence were offer'd, it is likely it would not prevail with them, becauſe the matter does not ſtick there. Their wills are diſtemper'd, "men hate to be reform'd," and this makes them "caſt the laws of GOD behind their backs;" and if GOD himſelf ſhould ſpeak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of Iſrael, yet for all that, they might continue "a ſtiff-"necked and rebellious people." Tho' the evidence were ſuch as their underſtandings could not reſiſt; yet their wills might ſtill hold out, and the preſent condition of their minds might have no laſting influence upon their hearts and lives; ſuch a violent conviction might affect them for the preſent, but the ſenſe of it might perhaps wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardneſs. Men by a long and obſtinate continuance in ſin, may bring themſelves to the temper and diſpoſition of devils; who though "they "believe and tremble" at the thoughts of GOD and his threatnings, yet they are wicked ſtill; for ſo long as men retain a ſtrong affection for their luſts, they will break through all conviction, and what evidence ſoever be offer'd to them, they will

will find some way or other to avoid it, and to delude themselves. The plain truth of the case is this, (if men will honestly speak their consciences, they cannot deny it) they do not call for more evidence, either because they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it; but that they may seem to have some excuse for themselves, for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4thly, experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and such as are obstinately addicted to their lusts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the history of the bible. What wonders were wrought in the sight of Pharaoh and the Egyptians! yet they were harden'd under all these plagues. Balaam, who "greedily followed the wages of unrighte-"ousness," was not to be stopt by the admonition of an angel. The Jews, after so many miracles which their eyes had seen, continued to be a "stiff-necked and gain-saying people;" so that it is hard to say which was more prodigious, the wonders which GOD wrought for them, or their rebellions against him; and when "in the fulness "of time," the SON of GOD came, and did among them "the works which never man did," such, as one would have thought might have brought the worst people in the world to repentance, those of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet they repented not. Yea the very thing which the rich man here in my text requested of Abraham for his brethren, was done among them; Lazarus did

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SERM. CXXVIII

rise from the dead, and testified unto them, and they were not persuaded.

And which is yet more, our SAVIOUR himself, according to his own prediction while he was alive, "rose again from the dead the third day," and was visibly taken up into heaven; and yet how few among them did "believe, and give "glory to GOD?" so that we see the very things here spoken of in the text, made good in a famous instance; they who "believed not Moses "and the prophets," which testified of the MESSIAS, were "not persuaded when he rose from "the dead."

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of GOD have had upon those who were not reclaimed by his word? It is not long since GOD shewed himself among us, by "terrible things in righ-"teousness," and visited us with three of his sorest judgments, war, and pestilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedness and impiety still reign and rage among us; it is a very sad consideration to see how little those who have outlived the plagues, have been reformed by them; "we have not return'd to the LORD, nor sought "him for all this."

I may appeal to the experience of particular persons. How frequently do we see men, after great afflictions, and tedious sufferings, and dangerous sicknesses, return to their former evil courses! and tho' they have been upon the brink of eternity, and "the terrors of death have compass'd them "about, and the pains of hell have almost taken "hold

" hold of them," tho' they have had as lively and sensible convictions of another world, as if they had spoken with those that had come from thence, or even been there themselves; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery, have been as mad, as furious sinners as they were before; so that it ought to be no such wonder to us, which the text tells us, that " if men hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose " from the dead." Especially, if we consider in the SERM. CXXVIII

5th and last place, that an effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of GOD, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by GOD for that end. To be effectually persuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the assistance of GOD's grace, and there is little reason to expect that GOD will afford his grace to those who reject and despise the counsels of his word. The doctrine of salvation contain'd in the holy scriptures, and the promises and threatnings of GOD's word, are the ordinary means which GOD hath appointed for the conversion of men, and to bring them to repentance; and if we sincerely use these means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of GOD's grace to make them effectual; but if we neglect and resist these means, in confidence that GOD should attempt

SERM. CXXVIII

tempt our recovery by some extraordinary ways; though he should gratify our presumptuous and unreasonable curiosity, so far as to send "one from "the dead to testify unto us:" yet we have no reason to expect the assistance of his grace, to make such a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have so long despised his word, and resisted his SPIRIT, which are "the power of GOD unto "salvation."

Without his grace and assistance, the most probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures; "by grace we are sa-"ved, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of "GOD." This grace is revealed to us in the gospel; and the assistances of it are conveyed to us by the gospel; and it is great presumption to promise to ourselves the assistance of GOD's grace in any other way than he hath been pleased to promise it to us.

And thus I have shewn you, as briefly and plainly as I could, how unlikely it is, that those who obstinately reject a clear and publick revelation of GOD, should be effectually convinced and brought to repentance by any apparitions from the dead.

I shall only make two or three inferences from this discourse which I have made, and so conclude.

1st, since the scriptures are the publick and standing revelation of GOD's will to men, and the ordinary means of salvation, we may hence conclude, that people ought to have them in such a language as they can understand. This our SAVIOUR plainly supposeth in the discourse which he

he repreſents between Abraham and the rich man; SERM. CXXVIII
deſiring that Lazarus might be ſent from the dead "to his brethren, to teſtify unto them;" to which requeſt Abraham would not have given this anſwer and advice, "they have Moſes and the prophets, "let them hear them," had he ſuppoſed that the ſcriptures then were or for the future ought to be lockt up from the people in an unknown tongue; for the rich man might very well have replied, "nay, father Abraham," but they are not permitted to have "Moſes and the prophets" in ſuch a language as they can underſtand; and therefore there is more need why "one ſhould be "ſent from the dead to teſtify unto them."

Nor would Abraham have ſaid again, "if they "hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will "they be perſuaded." For how ſhould men hear what they cannot underſtand, ſo as to be perſuaded by it?

It is evident then, that our SAVIOUR, according to the reaſoning of this parable, takes it for granted, that the holy ſcriptures are the ſtanding and ordinary means of bringing men to faith and repentance, and that the people are to have the free uſe of them. But ſince our SAVIOUR's time, the church of Rome hath found a mighty inconvenience in this, and therefore hath taken the ſcriptures out of the hands of the people. They will not now let them "have Moſes and the prophets," the goſpel of our bleſſed SAVIOUR, and the writings of his apoſtles, becauſe they are really afraid they ſhould "hear them," and by hearing of them, be convinced and perſuaded of the errors and corruptions

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SERM. CXXVIII

of their church; but instead of the scriptures of the old and new testament, they have put into their hands a legend of famous apparitions of "men "from the dead, testifying unto them" concerning purgatory and transubstantiation, and the worship of the blessed virgin and the saints, and the great benefit and refreshment which souls in purgatory have by the indulgences of the pope, and the prayers of the living put up to saints and angels on their behalf; so that in the church of Rome, quite contrary to our SAVIOUR's method, men are perswaded of their religion, of their new articles of faith, and ways of worship, not by Moses and the prophets, not by the doctrine of the holy scriptures (for they every where testify against them) but by absurd romances, and ill-contriv'd fictions of apparitions from the dead. I will dismiss this matter with this one observation, that however interested and confident men may set a bold face upon any thing, yet it cannot to considerate men but seem a very hard case, that there should be no salvation to be had out of the church of Rome; and yet the ordinary, and (in our SAVIOUR's judgment) the most effectual means of salvation are not to be had in it.

But I pass from this, to that which does more immediately concern our practice.

2dly, let us hear and obey that publick revelation of GOD's will, which in so much mercy to mankind, he hath been pleased to afford us. This is an inestimable privilege and advantage which the world in many ages was destitute of, having no other guide to conduct them to eternal happiness but the light of nature, and some particular revelations,

tions, which now and then GOD was pleaſed to make of his will to men: but now GOD hath ſet up a great and ſtanding light in the world, the doctrines of the holy ſcriptures; and by the goſpel of his bleſſed SON, hath "given the knowledge of "ſalvation to all men, for the remiſſion of their "ſins, through the tender mercies of GOD, where-"by the day-ſpring from on high hath viſited us, "to give light to them that ſit in darkneſs, and "in the ſhadow of death, and to guide our feet "into the way of peace," to convince us of the error of our ways, and to direct us in our duty. "We, upon whom the ends of the world are "come," do enjoy all the advantages of divine revelation which the world ever had, and as great as the world ever ſhall have. "GOD in theſe laſt "days hath ſpoken unto us by his SON," and if we will not hear him, GOD will employ no other extraordinary prophet and meſſenger to us. "If "the wrath of GOD ſo clearly revealed from hea-"ven by the goſpel of our bleſſed SAVIOUR, "againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of "men;" if the terror of the great day, and the fear of eternal torment; if the dreadful ſufferings of the SON of GOD for our ſins, and the merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and the glorious hopes of eternal life and happineſs will not prevail with us to leave our ſins, and to amend our lives, we have no reaſon to expect that GOD ſhould uſe any farther means to reclaim us; that he ſhould ever make any more attempts for our recovery. And therefore,

SERM. CXXVIII

SERM. CXXVIII

3dly, and lastly, those who are not brought to repentance, and effectually persuaded by this clear and publick revelation which GOD hath made of his will to men in the holy scriptures, have reason to look upon their case as desperate.

Methinks it should not be a desirable thing to any of us to be convinced by an apparition, the thing is so dreadful and full of terror; besides, that it argues men to be strangely hardened in a bad course, and obstinately bent upon their evil ways, when nothing will affright them from their sins, but what will almost put them out of their wits; when nothing will keep them from running into hell, but a fearful and ghastly messenger from thence. What a terrible sight would it be to any of us, to meet one of our companions, whom we had lately known in this world, fresh come out of those flames, with the smell of fire and brimstone upon him! what imagination can paint to it self the dread and horror of such a spectacle! the rich man here in the parable, when he was in hell, is represented as sensible of the inconvenience of this, and therefore he did not desire to be sent himself to his brethren, but desired that Lazarus might go and testify unto them: he was apprehensive how frightful a sight he himself must needs have been to them, and therefore he desires that they might have a gentle warning by one, who from out of Abraham's bosom had seen the miseries of the damned, but enjoyed the state of the blessed.

But let not us tempt GOD by any such unreasonable demand, who speaks to us every day by the plain declarations of his word, and hath of late years

years call'd so loudly upon us by the voice of his providence to repent and turn to him; by so many miracles of mercy and deliverance, as GOD hardly ever wrought for any prince and people, and by such terrible vollies of judgments, and full viols of wrath, as have seldom been poured out upon any nation. GOD speaks to you by his ministers, men like your selves (GOD knows, poor frail and sinful men) but we are sure, that when we call you to repentance, we deliver to you the will and pleasure, the counsels and commands of the great GOD, which (whatever account may be made of us) do certainly challenge your most awful attention and regard. And we are sensible that we are call'd to a very difficult and unpleasant work, to contend with the lusts and vices of men, to strive against the strong and impetuous streams of a wicked and perverse generation; and nothing in the world could move us to this unwelcome and grievous importunity, but a great and just sense of our own duty, and your danger. And if we will not take these warnings, why should we expect that GOD should vouchsafe to send an express messenger to us from the other world, to certify us how all things are there, and that not so much to help the weakness of our faith, as to humour the perverseness of our infidelity? and why should we imagine that this course would prove more effectual? "let us not "deceive our selves," the same lusts which now detain men so strongly in impenitency and unbelief, would in all probability hurry them on to hell, tho' an angel from heaven should meet them in their way, to give a stop to them. This indeed might SERM. CXXVIII

SERM. CXXVIII.

might ſtartle us; but nothing is like to ſave us, if the word of GOD and his grace do not.

But are we in earneſt, and would we "be perſuaded "if one ſhould riſe from the dead?" GOD hath condeſcended thus far to us, there is "one riſen "from the dead to teſtify unto us," JESUS the SON of GOD, who "died for our ſins, and roſe "again for our juſtification," and is aſcended into heaven, and ſet down at the right hand of GOD, to aſſure us of a bleſſed reſurrection, and a glorious immortality. And if this will not ſatisfy us, GOD will gratify our curioſity no farther. If we "will not believe him, whom GOD hath ſent," and to convince us that he hath ſent him, hath "raiſed him up from the dead, we ſhall die in our "ſins," and periſh in our impenitency. God hath in great mercy to mankind done that which is abundantly ſufficient to convince thoſe who are of a teachable temper and diſpoſition: but in great wiſdom and juſtice he hath not thought fit to provide any remedy for the wilful obſtinacy and intractable perverſeneſs of men.

Now GOD, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, perſuades us all, "to break off our ſins "by repentance, and to give glory to GOD," before death and darkneſs come, and the day of our final viſitation overtake us, when we may perhaps be ſurprized by a ſudden ſtroke, or ſeized upon by a violent diſeaſe, and may have no ſenſe and apprehenſion of our approaching danger; or if we have, "may find no place for repentance, tho' "we ſeek it with tears;" which GOD grant may never happen to be the caſe of any of us,

for

for his mercy's sake in CHRIST JESUS, to whom with the FATHER, &c.

SERMON CXXIX.

The children of this world wiser than the children of light.

LUKE xvi. 8.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

SERM. CXXIX. Preached at Whitehall, anno 1684.

THESE words are in the parable of the rich man's steward, who being called upon to give up his accounts, in order to his being discharged from his office, cast about with himself, what course he had best to take, to provide for his subsistence, when he should be turned out of his employment. At last he resolves upon this; that he will go to his LORD's debtors, and take a favourable account of them; and instead of "a hundred measures of oil, write down "fifty," and instead of "a hundred measures of "wheat, write down fourscore;" that by this means he might oblige them to be kind to him in his necessity. The lord hearing of this, commends the unjust steward, "because he had done wisely;" that is, he took notice of his dishonesty; but praised his shrewdness and sagacity, as having done prudently for himself, though he did not deal justly with

SERM. CXXIX.

with him; and this is usual among men. When we see a man ingeniously bad, to commend his wit, and to say it is great pity he doth not use it better, and apply it to good purposes. Upon the whole, our SAVIOUR makes this observation; "that the children of this world are in "their generation wiser than the children of "light;" as if he had said, thus did the worldly wise man, thus provident was he for his future security and subsistence. He no sooner understands that he is to be turned out of his office, but he considers what provision to make for himself against that time. And is it not pity, that good men do not apply this wisdom to better and greater purposes? for is not every man such a steward, intrusted by GOD with the blessings of this life, and many opportunities of doing good? for all which, since he must shortly give an account, he ought in all reason so to use them, as thereby to provide for the happiness of another life, against this temporal life have an end.

And this is all the parallel intended in this parable, as we may see by our SAVIOUR's application of it. For parables are not to be stretched to an exact parallel in all the parts and circumstances of them; but only to be applied to the particular point and purpose intended. A parable, and the moral accommodation of it, being (as one well observes) not like two plains, which touch one another in every part; but like a globe upon a plain, which only toucheth in one point. Thus our SAVIOUR separates the wisdom of this steward from his injustice, and proposeth that to our imitation; "the children

" children of this world are in their generation wiſer SERM.
" than the children of light." CXXIX.

The words are a compariſon; in which we have

1ſt, the perſons compared, " the children of this " world," and the " children of light." It is a very uſual phraſe among the Hebrews, when they would expreſs any thing to partake of ſuch a nature or quality, to call it the ſon or child of ſuch a thing. Thus good men are call'd " the children of " GOD," and bad men " the children of the " devil;" thoſe who mind earthly things, and make the things of this world their greateſt aim and deſign, are called " the children of this world;" and thoſe who are better enlightned with the knowledge of their own immortality, and the belief of a future ſtate after this life, are call'd " the children " of light."

2dly, here is the thing, wherein they are compared, and that is, as to their wiſdom and prudence.

3dly, the object of this prudence, which is not the ſame in both; as if the ſenſe were, " the chil- " dren of this world are wiſer than the children of " light," as to the things of this world; but here are two ſeveral objects intended, about which the prudence of theſe two ſorts of perſons is reſpectively exerciſed; the concernments of this world and the other. And our SAVIOUR's meaning is, that " the children of this world are wiſer in their gene- " ration;" that is, " in their way, viz. as to the intereſts and concernments of this world, " than the " children of light are in theirs," viz. as to the intereſts and concernments of the other world.

4thly, here is a decision of the matter, and which of them it is that excels in point of prudence, in their way; and our SAVIOUR gives it to the "children of this world; they are wiser in their ge-"neration, than the children of light."

Now this proposition is not to be taken in the utmost strictness and rigor; as if it were universally true, and without any exception; as if no man had ever been so wise and provident for his soul, and the concernments of another world, as worldly men are for the interests and concernments of this life. For there are some that are fools at large, and imprudent in their whole conduct and management, both as to their affairs of this world, and the other; who are in too strict a sense, "the children "of this world.' They mind nothing but this world, and yet are grosly imprudent, even in their prosecution of their temporal interests: they neglect and forego all other worldly advantages, for the sake of a little sensual pleasure; and then they lose and destroy that too, by an over-hot and eager pursuit of it, and turn it at last into gall and wormwood. And there are others, (as St. Paul for instance) who, I doubt not, have been as prudent and zealous, and industrious for the promoting of religion, and the salvation of themselves and others, as any man can be about the affairs of this present life; and I hope there are some such in every age, but GOD knows they are very few, and their wisdom and industry is seldom so equal, and constant, and uniform, as that of "the men of "this world."

So

SERM CXXIX.

So that we are to underſtand this ſaying of our SAVIOUR's with the ſame allowance as we generally do all moral and proverbial ſpeeches, that they are true for the moſt part, and the inſtances and exceptions to the contrary are very rare. It is ſeldom ſeen, that good men are ſo wiſe for the concernments of their ſouls, and of religion, as many worldly men are for their worldly intereſt.

In ſpeaking to this propoſition, I ſhall do theſe three things.

Firſt, confirm and illuſtrate the truth of it, by conſidering the ſeveral parts and properties of wiſdom.

Secondly, give ſome probable account of this, by conſidering what advantages "the children of "this world have above the children of light."

Thirdly, I ſhall draw ſome inferences from the whole, by way of application.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to confirm and illuſtrate the truth of this, by conſidering the ſeveral parts and properties of wiſdom. Now this is wiſdom, to mind and regard our chief end, and by all means to promote it; and this regard to our chief end doth expreſs it ſelf chiefly in theſe particulars; in our being firmly fixed and reſolved upon it; in chooſing the fitteſt means for the compaſſing and accompliſhing of it; in a diligent uſe of thoſe means; in an invincible conſtancy and perſeverance in the proſecution of it; and in making all things to ſubmit and to ſtoop to it. Theſe are the principal parts and properties of wiſdom; and I ſhall ſhew, that in all theſe "the children of this world" do uſually excel "the children of light."

SERM. CXXIX.

1ſt, they are uſually more firmly fixed and reſolved upon their end. Whatever they ſet up for their end, riches, or honours, or pleaſures, they are fixed upon it, and ſteady in the proſecution of it. If they ſet up for riches or honour, they neglect and deſpiſe pleaſure, if it croſs either of thoſe ends. And this fixed reſolution of the end is the great ſpring of action, and that which inſpires men with vigour and diligence in the uſe of means; and the more reſolved men are upon the end, the more active and induſtrious they will be in the uſe of means; for the end governs the means, and gives law and meaſure to our activity and induſtry in the uſe of them, and ſweetens and allays the trouble and difficulty of them.

So that where the end is once firmly fixed and reſolved upon, there will not be wanting fervour of proſecution; but if we be wavering and unſteady as to our end, this will weaken our hands, and quench the heat of our endeavours, and abate the heat of our endeavours, and abate the eagerneſs of our purſuit, and according to the degree of it, will derive a debility and inconſtancy into all our motions. "The double-minded man (as St. James "ſays) is unſtable in all his ways." Now "the "children of this world" are commonly more fixed and reſolved upon their end, than "the children "of light." 'Tis rare to ſee the whole life and actions of a good man, ſo conſtantly and uniformly conſpiring to the furtherance of his great end, ſo directly tending to the ſalvation of his ſoul, and the increaſe of his glory and happineſs in another world; as the actions of a worldly man, and the whole

whole courſe of his life do to the advancing of his worldly intereſts. The covetous or ambitious men ſeldom do any thing to the beſt of their knowledge, that is impertinent to their end, much leſs contrary to it; through every thing that they do one may plainly ſee the end they aim at, and that they are always true to it: whereas the beſt men do many things, which are plainly croſs and contrary to their end, and a great many more, which have no relation to it; and when they mind it, it is rather by fits and ſtarts, than in any even courſe and tenour of actions.

And of this we have a famous inſtance in that worldly and ſecular church, which now for ſeveral hundred of years hath more ſteadily purſu'd the end of ſecular greatneſs and dominion, than any other church hath done to the ends of true religion, the glory of GOD, and the ſalvation of the ſouls of men, ſo that there is hardly any doctrine or practice peculiar to that church, and differing from our common chriſtianity, but it hath a direct and viſible tendency to the promoting of ſome worldly intereſt or other. For inſtance, why do they deny the people the holy ſcriptures and the ſervice of GOD in a language which they can underſtand? but that by keeping them in ignorance, they may have them in more perfect ſlavery and ſubjection to them? why do they forbid their prieſts to marry? but that they may have no intereſt diſtinct from that of their church, and leave all to it when they die? to what end is auricular confeſſion? but to keep people in awe, by the knowledge of their ſecrets? why muſt the laity only receive the ſacra-

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SERM. CXXIX.

ment in one kind, but to draw a greater reverence to the prieſt, whoſe privilege it ſhall be to receive in both? and why is the intention of the prieſt neceſſary to the efficacy of the ſacraments? but to perſuade the people, that notwithſtanding the gracious intention of GOD toward mankind, they cannot be ſaved without the good-will of the prieſt? the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences are a plain device to make their markets of the ſins and ſouls of men. I might inſtance in a hundred things more in that church, which are of the ſame tendency. This St. John foretold ſhould be the character of the ſpirit of antichriſt, that it ſhould be a worldly ſpirit, and the doctrines of it ſhould ſerve a ſecular intereſt and deſign, 1 John iv. 5. "They are of the world, and they ſpeak "from the world, and the world hears them." What church is there in the world, ſo true throughout to the intereſt of religion, as this worldly church hath been to its own ſecular power and greatneſs?

2dly, "the children of this world" are wiſer in the choice of means in order to their end; and this is a great part of wiſdom. For ſome means will bring about an end with leſs pains and difficulty, and expence of time than others. And the men of the world are very ingenious in diſcerning the fitneſs and force of means to their ſeveral ends. To what a certainty have men reduced all the ways and arts of gain, and growing rich, and of riſing to honour and preferment? what long trains will men lay to bring about their deſired end? what ſubtile methods have men deviſed, to

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inſinuate themſelves into court; and when they are there, to plant themſelves in the eye of their prince, and in the ſun-ſhine of his favour? and then they have as many ways of worming others out, as of ſcrewing themſelves in.

But in the concernments of our ſouls, and the affairs of another world, how dull and injudicious are we? and how aukwardly and untowardly do we apply means to ends, as if men were "only "wiſe to do evil, but to do good had no under-"ſtanding," as the prophet complains? by what incongruous and irregular means do many (who would ſeem to be, and ſometimes perhaps are, very zealous in religion) endeavour (as they think) to promote GOD's glory, by pious frauds and counterfeit miracles, and telling officious lies for GOD? what a compaſs do many men fetch to go to heaven, by innumerable devices of will-worſhip, by voluntary ſeverities, neither pleaſing to GOD, nor profitable to men? by tedious pilgrimages and ſenſeleſs ceremonies, and innumerable little external obſervances of no virtue or efficacy in religion? and by wandring through a wilderneſs of opinions, and the buſhes and brakes of unprofitable queſtions, and controverſies? whereas the way to heaven lies plain and ſtraight before us, conſiſting in ſimplicity of belief, and in holineſs and innocency of life. Not but that there are great differences in the church of Rome, between the ſecular prieſts and the regular; between the janſeniſts and the jeſuits: but they ſtill unite in a common intereſt, and are ſubject to antichriſt their common head. They do not ſeparate from one another, and excommuni-

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SERM. CXXIX.

cate one another, and declare againſt one another, that they are not of the true church. "Satan ne- "ver caſts out Satan;" and though he loves diviſions among chriſtians, yet he always takes care, that "his own kingdom be not divided againſt "it ſelf," ſo as to endanger the ruin of it. And whenever they have any hopeful deſign for the extirpation of proteſtants, they can lay aſide their enmities, and be reconciled in ſuch a deſign. Then the pope and the kings of the earth "take coun- "ſel together," and like Herod and Pilate, when CHRIST was to be crucified, can be made friends at a day's warning. Whereas the diviſions of the true church are pernicious to it, and, as we ſee at this day among ourſelves, our ſenſeleſs differences and wild heats on both ſides, do contribute to the ſetting up of popery, and the ruin of the reformed religion; and yet no perſuaſion, no experience can make us wiſer.

3dly, "the children of this world" are commonly more diligent in the uſe of means for the obtaining of their end; they will ſweat and toil, and take any pains, "riſe up early and lie down "late, and eat the bread of carefulneſs;" their thoughts are continually running upon their buſineſs, and they catch at every opportunity of promoting it; they will pinch nature and haraſs it; and rob themſelves of their reſt, and all the comfort of their lives to raiſe their fortune and eſtate. What drudges were Cæſar and Alexander in the way of fame and ambition? how did they tire themſelves and others with long and tedious marches? to what inconveniences and dangers did they ex-

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SERM. CXXIX.

poſe themſelves and thouſands more? what havock and deſtruction did they make in the world, that they might gain to themſelves the empty title of conquerors of it? when the men of the world engage in any deſign, how intent are they upon it, and with what vigour do they proſecute it? they do not counterfeit a diligence, and ſeem to be more ſerious and induſtrious than in truth they are; they are rather hypocrites the other way, and would conceal their covetouſneſs and ambition, and not ſeem to aſpire after riches and honours ſo much as indeed they do.

But in the purſuit of better things, how cold and remiſs are we? with what a careleſs indifference do moſt men mind their ſouls? how negligent and formal, and many times hypocritical are they in the ſervice of GOD, and the exerciſe of religion? with what a pitiful courage, and with what faint ſpirits do they reſiſt ſin, and encounter the temptations of it? and how often, and how eaſily are they foiled and baffled by them.

4thly, the men of the world are more invincibly conſtant and pertinacious in the purſuit of earthly things; they are not to be bribed or taken off by favour or fair words; not to be daunted by difficulties, or daſht out of countenance by the frowns and reproaches of men. Offer an ambitious man any thing ſhort of his end and aim, to take him off from the proſecution of it; he ſcorns the motion, and thinks you go about to fool him out of his intereſt. Bait a covetous man with temptations of pleaſure, to get his money from him; how generouſly will this mean-ſpirited man trample upon

SERM CXXIX.

pleasure, when it would tempt him from his design of being rich?

Difficulties do not daunt them, but whet their courage, and quicken their endeavours, and set a keener edge upon their spirits. Give an ambitious man almost a demonstration of the impossibility of his attempts; *contrà audentior ibit*, he will go on so much the more boldly and resolutely. In the ways of religion men are apt to be discouraged and put out of countenance, by contempt and reproach; but a covetous man is not to be jeer'd and flurted out of his money and estate; he can be content to be rich, and give leave to those that are not so, to laugh at him.

Populus mihi sibilat, at mihi plaudo.

The rich worldling can hug himself and his bags, when the world hisseth at him; he can bear "to be hated, and persecuted, and have all manner of evil spoke against him for money sake:" and in the pursuits of these designs, men will, with great resolution, encounter enmity and opposition, and endure great sufferings and persecution. How many have been martyrs to their lusts, and have sacrificed their ease and health, and even their lives, in the prosecution of their ambitious, and covetous, and voluptuous designs?

But, on the other hand, how easily are men checked and diverted from a good course, by the temptations and advantages of this world; how many are cold in their zeal for religion, by the favour and friendship of this world? and as their goods and estates have grown greater, their devo-

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tion hath grown leſs. How apt are they to be terrified at the apprehenſion of danger and ſufferings; and, by their fearful imaginations, to make them greater than they are, and with the people of Iſrael to be diſhearten'd from all farther attempts of entering "into the land of promiſe," becauſe it is "full of giants and the ſons of Anak?" How eaſily was Peter frighted into the denial of his maſter? and when our SAVIOUR was apprehended, how did his diſciples forſake him, and fly from him? and tho' they were conſtant afterwards to the death, yet it was a great while before they were perfectly armed and ſteeled againſt the fear of ſuffering.

5thly, the men of the world will make all things ſtoop and ſubmit to that which is their great end and deſign; their end rules them and governs them, and gives laws to all their actions; they will make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not ſerve their end one way or other, they will have nothing to do with it. If an ambitious man ſeek wealth, it is but in order to his deſign to purchaſe friends, and ſtrengthen his intereſt, and to make his riſing the eaſier; he will lay his whole eſtate at the ſtake, rather than miſs of his end. The covetous man will quit his pleaſure, when it lies croſs to his intereſt, if he have any expenſive luſt and chargeable vice, he will turn it off, or exchange it for ſome more frugal and profitable ſin.

But in the affairs of religion, and the concernments of our ſouls, how frequently do men act without a due regard and conſideration of their great end? and inſtead of making other things

SERM. CXXIX.

submit to it, they often bow and bend it to their inferior interest. They make heaven stoop to earth, and religion to serve a worldly design; and the glory of GOD to give way to gain, and the great concernments of their souls, and their eternal salvation, to their temporal profit and advantage. The men of the world are generally true to their great end, and pay it that respect which is due to it, and will suffer nothing to take place of it in their esteem and affection; and if men were as wise for their souls and for another world, they would bring all things to their great end, and make all the concernments of this temporal life to yield and give way to the great concernments of their eternal happiness. I proceed in the

Second place to give some account of this, whence it comes to pass, that "the children of this world "are wiser in their generation than the children "of light." And this I shall do by considering what advantages "the children of this world" have, as to the affairs of this world, above what good men have, as to the concernments of another world. I shall instance in four or five of the chief.

1st, the things of this world are present and sensible, and because of their nearness to us, are apt to strike powerfully upon our senses, and to affect mightily to excite our desires after them, and to work strongly upon our hopes and fears: but the things of another world being remote from us, are lessened by their distance, and consequently are not apt to work so powerfully upon

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SERM. CXXIX.

our minds. They are inviſible to us, and only diſcerned by faith, which is a more obſcure and leſs certain perception of things, than we have of thoſe objects which are preſented to our bodily eyes. "The things which GOD hath prepared for "them that love him," the glory and happineſs of the next world, are "things which eye "hath not ſeen, nor ear heard" "The children "of light" do not ſee GOD, as "the children "of this world" ſee mammon.

2dly, the ſenſual delights and enjoyments of this world, are better ſuited and more agreeable to the corrupt and degenerate nature of men, than ſpiritual and heavenly things are to thoſe that are regenerate. In this lapſed and degenerate ſtate of mankind, appetite and ſenſe are apt to prevail above reaſon; and therefore thoſe things which are moſt delightful to ſenſe, we favour and mind, and love to buſy ourſelves about them, becauſe they are moſt ſuitable to the animal life, which is the governing principle of corrupt nature.

And the reaſon of this is plain, becauſe that principle in worldly and ſenſual men, which purſues earthly things, is in thoſe who are unregenerate entire and undivided, and conſequently the affections and inclinations of the whole man do all tend one way, and run out towards thoſe things in a full and undivided ſtream; whereas good men are but regenerate in part, and tho' they have a principle of ſpiritual life in them, yet their affections are divided, and there is a great ſtruggling and conflict between fleſh and ſpirit, and it is a great while before the ſpiritual principle doth clearly prevail, and

SERM. CXXIX.

and get a perfect victory over our sensual appetites and inclinations. Mens affections to the world are entire and unbroken, and therefore they pursue these things with all their might: but the best men are but good in part; and that heavenly principle which is in them, is very much hindred in its operations by a contrary principle, our earthly and sensual inclinations, which are hardly ever perfectly subdu'd and brought under in this world.

3dly, the wordly man's faith and hope, and fear of present and sensible things, is commonly stronger than a good man's faith, and hope, and fear of things future and eternal. Now faith, and hope, and fear, are the great principles which govern and bear sway in the actions and lives of men. If a man be once firmly persuaded of the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and possessed with good hopes of obtaining it, and great fears and apprehensions of the dangers of missing it, this man may almost be put upon any thing. The merchant trafficks, and the husbandman plows and sows in faith and hope, because he is convinced that bread is necessary to the support of life, and hopes that GOD will so bless his labours, that he shall reap the fruit of them, and plainly sees, that if he do not take this pains, he must starve. But how few are there that believe, and hope, and fear concerning the things of another world, as "the "children of this world" do concerning the things of this world? if any man ask me, how I know this? I appeal to experience; it is plain and visible in the lives and actions and endeavours of men. Good men are seldom so effectually and throughly persuaded

perſuaded of the principles of religion, and the truth of the ſayings contained in the holy ſcriptures, as the men of the world are of their own ſayings and proverbs. Men do not believe that "honeſty is the "beſt policy," or as Solomon expreſſeth it, that "he that walketh uprightly, walketh ſurely;" as the men of the world believe their own maxims, that "a man may be too honeſt to live;" that "plain-dealing is a jewel, but he that wears it "ſhall die a beggar." Few mens hopes of heaven are ſo powerful and vigorous, and have ſo ſenſible an effect upon their lives, as the worldly man's hopes of gain and advantage. Men are not ſo afraid to ſwear, as they are to ſpeak treaſon; they are not ſo firmly perſuaded of the danger of ſin to their ſouls and bodies in another world, as of the danger to which ſome crimes againſt the laws of men do expoſe their temporal lives and ſafety; therefore they will many times venture to offend GOD, rather than incur the penalty of human laws. SERM. CXXIX.

4thly, the men of the world have but one deſign, and are wholly intent upon it, and this is a great advantage. He that hath but one thing to mind, may eaſily be skill'd and excel in it. When a man makes one thing his whole buſineſs, no wonder if he be very knowing and wiſe in that. Now the men of the world mind worldly things, and have no care and concernment for any thing elſe. It is a ſaying, I think, of Thomas Aquinas, *cave ab illo qui unicum legit librum:* "he is a dangerous man that "reads but one book;" he that gives his mind but to one thing, muſt needs be too hard for any man at that. Application to one thing, eſpecially in mat-

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SERM. CXXIX

ters of practice, gains a man perfect experience in it, and experience furnisheth him with observations about it, and these make him wise and prudent in that thing.

But good men, tho' they have a great affection for heaven and heavenly things, yet the business and necessities of this life, do very much divert and take them off from the care of better things; they are divided between the concernments of this life and the other; and tho' there be but "one thing ne-"cessary" in comparison, yet the conveniencies of this life are to be regarded; and tho' our souls be our main care, yet some consideration must be had of our bodies, that they may be fit for the service of our souls; some provision must be made for their present support, so long as we continue in these earthly tabernacles; and this will necessarily engage us in the world, so that we cannot always and wholly apply our selves to heavenly things, and mind them as the men of the world do the things of this world.

5thly, and lastly, the men of the world have a greater compass and liberty in the pursuit of their worldly designs, than good men have in the prosecution of their interest. The "children of light" are limited and confin'd to the use of lawful means, for the compassing of their ends, but the men of the world are not so strait-laced, *quocunque modo rem*, they are resolv'd upon the point, and will stick at no means to compass their end. They do not stand upon the nice distinctions of good and evil, of right and wrong, invented by speculative and scrupulous men, to puzzle business, and to hinder

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and diſappoint great deſigns. If Ahab have a mind to Naboth's vineyard, and Naboth will not let him be honeſt, and have it for a valuable conſideration, he will try to get it a cheaper way: Naboth ſhall by falſe witneſs be made a traitor, and his vineyard by this means ſhall be forfeited to him. And thus the unjuſt ſteward in the parable provided for himſelf; he wronged his lord, to ſecure a retreat to himſelf in the time of his diſtreſs.

The third and laſt thing only remains, to make ſome inferences from what hath been ſaid by way of application. And,

1ſt, notwithſtanding the commendation which hath been given of the wiſdom of this world, yet upon the whole matter it is not much to be valued and admired. It is indeed great in its way and kind; but it is applied to little and low purpoſes, employ'd about the concernments of a ſhort time and a few days, about the worſt and meaneſt part of our ſelves, and accompanied with the neglect of greater and better things, ſuch as concern our ſouls, and our whole duration, even our happineſs to all eternity. And therefore that which the world admires and cries up for wiſdom, is in the eſteem of GOD, who judgeth of things according to truth, but vanity and folly. "The wiſdom of the world "(ſaith St. Paul) is fooliſhneſs with GOD." The rich man in the parable, who increaſed his goods, and enlarged his barns, and laid up for many years, did applaud himſelf, and was no doubt applauded by others for a very wiſe man: but becauſe "he "laid up treaſure for himſelf, and was not rich to-"ward GOD," that is, did not employ his eſtate

SERM CXXIX

to good and charitable purposes, therefore GOD, who calls no body out of his right name, calls this man "fool; thou fool, this night shall thy soul "be taken from thee, and then whose shall all "these things be?" And our SAVIOUR here in the text, while he commends the "wisdom of the "children of this world," he adds that which is a considerable blemish and abatement to it, "the "children of this world are wiser, ἀὶς τὴν γενεὰν "τῶν ἑαυτῶν, for their age," for the concernments of this present life; but this is but a short and purblind wisdom, which sees but a little way, and considers only things present and near at hand; whereas true wisdom hath a larger and farther prospect, and regards the future as well as the present, and takes care to provide for it. Nay, our SAVIOUR gives the wisdom of this world its utmost due, when he says, "the children of this world are wiser for "their generation;" for this is the very best that can be said of it, it seldom looks so far, and holds out so long. Many men have survived their own projects, and have lived to see the folly and ill fate of their covetous and ambitious designs. So the prophet tells us, Jer. xvii. 11. "As the partridge "sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he "that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave "them in the midst of his days, and at his end "shall be a fool."

This is wisdom, to regard our main interest; but if we be wrong in our end, (as all worldly men are) the faster and farther we go, the more fatal is our error and mistake. "The children of this "world" are out in their end, and mistaken in the

the main; they are wiſe for this world, which is inconſiderable to eternity; wiſe for a little while, and fools for ever. SERM. CXXIX.

2dly, from what hath been ſaid, we may infer, that if we loſe our ſouls, and come ſhort of eternal happineſs, it is through our own fault and groſs neglect; for we ſee that men are wiſe enough for this world; and the ſame prudence, and care, and diligence applied to the concernments of our ſouls, would infallibly make us happy. Nay, our SAVIOUR here in the text tells us, that uſually leſs wiſdom and induſtry, than the men of this world uſe about the things of this world, is exerciſed by "the children of light," who yet at laſt, through the mercy of GOD, do attain eternal life.

So that it is very plain, that if men would but take that care for their immortal ſouls, which they generally do for their frail and dying bodies, and be as heartily concerned for the unſeen world, and for eternity, as they are for things viſible and temporal, they would with much more certainty gain heaven, than any man can obtain worldly riches and honours. And can we in conſcience deſire more, than to be happy for ever, upon as eaſy and upon more certain terms, than any man can be rich or great in the world? for we may miſs of theſe things after all our travel and pains about them; or if we get them, we may loſe them again: but if we "ſeek the kingdom of GOD, and his "righteouſneſs;" if we be ſincerely good we are ſure to have the reward of it, even that "eternal "life, which GOD, that cannot lie, hath promiſed;"

SERM. CXXIX.

if we "lay up for our ſelves treaſures in heaven," they will be ſafe and ſecure there, where "no moth "can corrupt, nor thieves break through and "ſteal."

If we would ſeriouſly think of the other world, and were throughly poſſeſt with a firm belief of the eternity of that happineſs or miſery, which remains for men after this life, we ſhould pray to GOD and hear his word, and perform all the duties of religion, with the ſame care and concernment, with the ſame fervour and intention of mind, as men proſecute their worldly buſineſs. Were we fully perſuaded of the unſeen glories and torments of the other world, we ſhould be much more affected with them, than with all the temptations and terrors of ſenſe; becauſe in reaſon they are much more conſiderable. The diſgrace of the pillory will fright men from perjury; and will not everlaſting ſhame and confuſion? the fear of death will deter many men from robbing and ſtealing, who would perhaps venture upon theſe crimes, if there were no danger in them; and will not the horrors of the "ſecond death, of the worm that "dies not, and the fire that is not quenched," have as great an awe and influence upon us? If they have not, it is a ſign, that we do not equally believe the danger of humane laws, and the damnation of hell.

Surely men have not the ſame belief of heaven, and affection for it, that they have for this world. If they had, their care and diligence about theſe things would be more equal. For we are not ſo weak as we make our ſelves; we are not yet ſo degenerate,

degenerate, but if we would ſet our ſelves ſeriouſly to it, and earneſtly beg the aſſiſtance of GOD's grace, we might come to know our duty, and our wills might be engaged to follow the directions of our underſtandings, and our affections to obey the command of our wills, and our actions to follow the impulſe of our affections. Much of this is naturally in our power; and what is wanting, the grace of GOD is ready to ſupply. We can go to the church, and we can hear the word of GOD, and we can conſider what we hear, we can pray to GOD, and ſay, "we believe, LORD help our unbelief," and enable us to do what thou requireſt of us; and we can forbear a great many ſins, which we raſhly and wilfully run into; a great preſent danger will fright us from ſin, a terrible ſtorm will drive us to our devotion, and teach us to pray; a ſharp fit of the gout will take a man off from drinking; the eye of a maſter or magiſtrate will reſtrain men from many things, which they ſay they cannot forbear. So that we do but counterfeit, and make our ſelves more cripples than we are, that we may be pitied; for if fear will reſtrain us, it is a ſign that we can forbear; if "the rod "of affliction will fetch it out" of us, and make us do that, which at other times we ſay we are unable to do, this is a demonſtration that it is in us, and that the thing is in our power.

It is true, we can do nothing that is good without the aſſiſtance of GOD's grace: but that aſſiſtance which we may have for the asking, is in effect in our own power. So that if the matter were ſearched to the bottom, it is not want of power that

SERM. CXXIX.

that hinders us from doing our duty, but ſloth and negligence; for GOD hath "given us exceeding "great and precious promiſes, whereby we may be "made partakers of a divine nature;" and by virtue whereof, if we be not wanting to our ſelves, we may "cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh "and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of "GOD."

3dly and laſtly, what a ſhame and reproach is this to "the children of light!" Our SAVIOUR ſpeaks this by way of upbraiding, as we may judge by the terms of compariſon which he uſeth, that "the children of this world ſhould be wiſer than "the children of light," that is, than "wiſdom's "own children;" and that they ſhould be "wiſer "in their generation," that is, for the concernments of a ſhort and inconſiderable time, than the others are for all eternity.

How ſhould it make our blood to riſe in our faces, and fill us with confuſion, that the men of this world ſhould be more prudent and skilful in the contrivance and management of their little affairs, more reſolute and vigorous in the proſecution of them; than we are about the everlaſting concernments of our ſouls! that a worldly church ſhould uſe wiſer and more effectual means to promote and uphold ignorance, and error, and ſuperſtition; than we do to build up the true church of CHRIST in knowledge, and faith, and charity! that the men of the world ſhould toil, and take more pains for "the deceitful riches;" than we do for "the "true;" and be contented to hazard more for "a "corruptible crown," than we for "an incorrup-"tible!"

" tible!" that they ſhould love pleaſure more, than we do GOD, and mind their bodies and temporal eſtates more, than we do our ſouls and our eternal happineſs! SERM. CXXIX.

Do but obſerve the men of the world, what a pace they go, what large and nimble ſteps they take in the purſuit of earthly things; they do not ſeek riches " as if they ſought them not," and love the world " as if they loved it not," and enjoy the preſent delights of this world, " as if they poſſeſſed " them not;" tho' " the faſhion of this world " paſſeth away:" but we ſeek heaven, " as if we " ſought it not," and love GOD " as if we loved " him not," and mind eternity and the world to come, " as if we minded them not;" and yet " the faſhion of that world doth not paſs away."

But to all this it may be ſaid, you have already told us, that " the children of this world" have ſo many advantages above " the children of light," that it is no wonder if they excel and outſtrip them; and it is very true, that in many reſpects they have the advantage of them. But if " the children of " light" would look about them, and take all things into conſideration, they might ſee ſomething very conſiderable to balance the advantages on the other ſide. It is true, the things of this world are preſent and ſenſible: but ſo long as we have ſufficient aſſurance of the reality of a future ſtate, and of the rewards and puniſhments of it, the greatneſs and eternity of theſe is ſuch an amazing conſideration that no diſtance can render them inconſiderable to a prudent and thinking man. And tho' the men of the world have an entire principle, which is not divided

SERM. CXXIX.

vided between GOD and the world; whereas in good men there is a great conflict of contrary principles, the flesh and spirit: yet this disadvantage is likewise balanced by that powerful assistance of GOD's grace, which is promised to all good men, who heartily beg it of him, and are sincerely resolved to make use of it. And lastly, tho' the men of the world have many ways to compass their ends; yet "the children of light" have one great and infallible one. All the means which the men of the world use to accomplish their designs, may fail and miscarry; for "the race is not to the swift, "nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the "wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor "favour to men of skill; but time and chance hap-"pen to all:" but he that sincerely serves GOD, and useth the means for the attaining of everlasting salvation, is sure to attain it; if we "seek the "righteousness of GOD" as we ought, we shall certainly be admitted into his kingdom. And this surely is an unspeakable advantage which "the chil-"dren of light" have above "the children of this "world," that if we faithfully use the means, we cannot fail of the end; "if we have our fruit unto "holiness, our end shall be everlasting life;" which GOD of his infinite goodness grant to us all for his mercies sake.

SERMON

SERMON CXXX.

Concerning the perfection of GOD.

MATTH. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your FATHER *which is in heaven is perfect.*

SERM. CXXX. The first sermon on this text.

THESE words are the concluſion which our SAVIOUR draws from thoſe precepts of greater perfection, than any laws that were extant in the world before, ver. 44. "I ſay unto you, "love your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do "good to them that hate you, and pray for thoſe "that deſpitefully uſe you and perſecute you." And to perſuade them hereto, he propounds to them the pattern of the divine perfection; telling them, that being thus affected towards their enemies, they ſhould reſemble GOD, ver. 45. "That ye "may be the children of your heavenly FATHER; "for he maketh the ſun to riſe on the evil, and "on the good; and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and "on the unjuſt."

And then he tells us, that if we be not thus affected towards our enemies, and thoſe that have been injurious to us, we are ſo far from being like GOD, that we are but juſt level with the worſt of men, ver. 46, 47. "For if ye love them "which love you, what reward have you, do not "even the publicans the ſame? and if ye ſalute

8.

SERM. CXXX.

" your brethren only, what do ye more than others? " do not even the publicans so?" And then concludes, that if we would attain that perfection which the christian religion designs to advance men to, we must endeavour to be like GOD in these perfections of goodness and mercy, and patience; " be ye therefore perfect, as your FATHER which " is in heaven is perfect." In which words we have,

First, the absolute perfection of the divine nature supposed; " as your FATHER which is in heaven is " perfect."

Secondly, it is propounded as a pattern to our imitation. " Be ye therefore perfect, &c."

In handling of these words I shall do these four things.

I. Consider how we are to conceive of the " di- " vine perfection."

II. I shall lay down some rules whereby we may govern and rectify our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD.

III. How far we are to imitate the perfections of GOD, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. I shall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here intended by our SAVIOUR is not impossible to us; and then conclude this discourse with some useful inferences from the whole.

I. I shall consider how we are to conceive of the " divine perfections:" these two ways,

1. By

SERM. CXXX.

1. By aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible perfection to GOD.

2. By ſeparating and removing all manner of imperfection from him.

1. By aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible perfection to GOD; abſolute and univerſal perfection, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particulars; but whatever we can conceive and imagine to be a perfection, is to be aſcribed to him; yea, and beyond this, whatever poſſible perfection there is, or poſſible degree of any perfection, which our ſhort underſtandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be aſcribed to him. For we are not to confine the perfection of GOD to our imagination, as "if we could find out the al- "mighty to perfection:" but, on the contrary, to believe the perfection of the divine nature to be boundleſs and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our higheſt thoughts and apprehenſions.

More particularly, all kinds and degrees of perfection are to be aſcribed to GOD, which either do not imply a plain contradiction, or do not argue ſome imperfection, or are not evidently inconſiſtent with ſome other and greater perfection.

Some things may ſeem to be perfections, which in truth are not, becauſe they are plainly impoſſible, and involve a contradiction, as that what has once been, ſhould by any power be made not to have been; or that any thing, which by its nature is limited and confin'd to one place, ſhould at the ſame time be in another. Theſe things in reaſon are impoſſible, and therefore not

SERM. CXXX

to be supposed to fall under any power how unlimited soever. For if we once ascribe contradictions to GOD, we destroy his being; because then to be, and not to be, power, and no power, would be all one.

And then there are some perfections which do argue and suppose imperfections in them; as motion, the quickness and swiftness whereof in creatures is a perfection, but then it supposeth a finite and limited nature: for a boundless and immense being, that is every where present at once, hath no need to move from one place to another; and therefore, though motion be a perfection in creatures, there is no reason to ascribe it to GOD, because it supposeth a greater imperfection.

And there are also some imaginable degrees of perfection, which, because they are inconsistent with other perfections, are not to be admitted in the divine nature. For instance, such degrees of goodness and mercy may be imagin'd, as would quite exclude and shut out justice; and on the other hand such a strictness and a rigor of justice, as would leave no room at all for patience and mercy; and therefore such degrees are not really to be esteemed perfections. For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a divine perfection, which evidently clasheth with any other necessary and essential perfection of the divine nature. We must so consider the perfections of GOD, that they may accord and consist together; and therefore it cannot be a perfection of GOD to be so good and gracious as to encourage sin, and to overthrow the reverence of his own laws and government.

ment. 'Tis not goodneſs, but eaſineſs and weakneſs, to be contented to be perpetually injured and affronted. 'Tis not patience to be willing to be everlaſtingly trampled upon. So likewiſe on the other hand, 'tis not a perfection to be ſo ſevere and rigorous, as to ſmite a ſinner in the inſtant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from puniſhment, and to give time for repentance. SERM. CXXX.

But whatever perfection is conceivable or poſſible, and argues no imperfection, nor is repugnant to any other neceſſary perfection, is to be aſcribed to GOD; for this is the moſt natural and eaſy conception that we can have of GOD, that he is the moſt perfect being. This natural light doth firſt ſuggeſt and offer to the minds of men, and we cannot conceive of GOD as meer power and will, without wiſdom and goodneſs. Hence it is that the Greeks call GOD very often, τὸ κρεῖττον, "the beſt of beings," and the Latin, *optimus maximus*, "the beſt and the greateſt," *beatiſſima & perfectiſſima natura, conſtans & perfecta ratio*, "the happieſt and moſt perfect nature, immutable and abſolute reaſon:" and many other ſuch expreſſions which we meet with in the writings of the heathen philoſophers. I readily grant, that the firſt and moſt obvious thought which men have of GOD, is that of his greatneſs and majeſty; but this neceſſarily involves or infers his goodneſs; as Seneca excellently reaſons, *primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere, dein reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine quâ nulla majeſtas*, "the firſt worſhip of the gods, is to believe

SERM. CXXX.

" believe their being; next to aſcribe to them " greatneſs and majeſty, to aſcribe to them " goodneſs, without which there can be no ma- " jeſty."

And we ſhall find all along in Plato and Tully, and the beſt and wiſeſt writers among the heathens, that they every where attribute the higheſt excellencies and perfections to the divine nature, and do ſteer and govern all their diſcourſes of GOD by this principle, that perfection is to be aſcribed to him: and whenever any thing is ſaid of GOD, they examine whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aſide as a thing not fit to be ſpoken of him.

And in the ſcripture we do every where find perfection aſcribed to the nature and works and laws of GOD, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him. Job xxxvii. 16. " Doſt " thou know the wondrous works of him that is " perfect in knowledge?" And again, " Canſt " thou by ſearching find out GOD? canſt thou " find out the almighty to perfection?" Pſalm. xviii. 30. " As for GOD his way is perfect." Pſalm. xix. 7. " The law of the LORD is per- " fect."

I ſhall not need to conſider particularly the ſeveral perfections of the divine nature; I ſhall only give you a brief ſcheme and draught of them. Whatever perfection can be imagin'd either in the manner of being or acting, is to be aſcribed to GOD; therefore, as to his nature, we ſay that he is a ſpirit, that is, that he is not meer body

or

or matter, because that would exclude several other perfections; for meer matter is incapable both of knowledge and liberty, being determined by necessary laws and motions; and yet without knowledge and liberty, there can be no wisdom nor goodness. We say of GOD, that he is of himself, and without cause, and does not owe his being to any other; and consequently that he is necessarily, and that he cannot but be, and cannot be otherwise than he is; for that which is of it self, did not choose whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwise; for to suppose any thing to deliberate or consult about its own being, is to suppose it to be before it is.

We must say of GOD likewise, that he is immense, and every where present, because to be limited is an imperfection; and that he is eternal, that is, ever was, and shall be; for to cease to be, is a greater imperfection than sometime not to have been.

And then we are to say of GOD, that he is the cause of all other beings; that they are made by him, and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the most perfect manner, by a glance of his mind, and by the meer beck and nod of his will, without long study or deliberation, without laborious pains and endeavours, and consequently that nothing is exempted from his knowledge and power, and providence, and that he administers all things in a way of goodness and wisdom, of justice and truth;

SERM. CXXX.

truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their laſt end. All theſe perfections, and all other that are poſſible, we are to look upon the divine nature as fully and immutably poſſeſt of, and that in an higher and more excellent degree than our finite underſtandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to aſcribe all imaginable poſſible perfections to GOD, ſo we are to ſeparate and remove all manner of imperfection from him. We muſt not obſcure or blemiſh the divine nature with the leaſt ſhadow or blot of imperfection. If we once admit of this, to aſcribe any thing to GOD which argues imperfection, we ſtrike at the foundation, and deſtroy one of the cleareſt and moſt eſſential notions which men have of GOD. And therefore we find the ſcripture very careful to remove all kinds of natural or moral imperfection from GOD. Gen. xviii. 25. "That "be far from thee to do after this manner, to "ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that "the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be "far from thee; ſhall not the judge of all the "world do right?" Deut. xxxii. iv. "A GOD "of truth, and without iniquity." Rom. ix. 14. "What ſhall we ſay then, is there unrighteouſ-"neſs with GOD? GOD forbid," far be it from him.

Hence it is that in ſcripture holineſs is ſo frequently aſcribed to GOD, which ſignifies the purity and freedom of the divine nature from that which we call ſin; and GOD is very ſolicitous to

give

give us such a notion of himself, as may remove sin and unrighteousness at the greatest distance from him, because that is the greatest of imperfections. Is it an imperfection to countenance sin? the scripture acquits GOD of it, Psal. v. 4, 5. "Thou "art not a GOD that hath pleasure in wickedness, "neither shall evil dwell with thee." Is it an imperfection to go from ones word, or to change ones mind? this likewise is removed from GOD. 1 Sam. xv. 29. "The strength of Israel will not lye or re- "pent: he is not a man, that he should repent." Is it an imperfection to want any thing, to be liable to any thing, to depend upon any thing without ones self for happiness? this also is to be set far from him. Job xxii. 2, 3. "Can a man be "profitable to GOD? or is it a gain to him, that "thou makest thy way perfect?" Job xxxv. 6, 7. "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or "if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou "unto him? if thou art righteous, what givest "thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? "thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and "thy righteousness may profit the son of man." Is it an imperfection to tempt, or to be tempted to sin? this is to be separated from GOD, "he can- "not be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any "man," saith St. James, chap. i. 17. And to mention no more, is it an imperfection to be in any respect mutable? this is denied of GOD. "With "him there is no variableness, or shadow of turn- "ing." Thus you see how we are to conceive of the perfections of GOD, by ascribing all imagina-

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SERM. CXXX.

ble and poſſible perfections to him, and removing all ſhadow of imperfection from him. I proceed in the

IId place to lay down ſome rules by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD: the beſt I can think of, are theſe following.

Firſt, let us begin with the moſt natural, and plain, and eaſy perfections of GOD, and lay them for a foundation, and rectify all our other apprehenſions of GOD, and reaſonings about him, by theſe; and theſe are his power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, to which moſt of the reſt may be reduced. Right apprehenſions and a firm belief of theſe will make it eaſily credible to us, that all things were made and are governed by him; for his goodneſs will diſpoſe and incline him to communicate being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. And infinite power and wiſdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any diſturbance of his eaſe or happineſs, as Epicurus would ſeem vainly to fear; who in truth did not believe a GOD, but pretended only to deny his providence, and that he either made or govern'd the world, becauſe he was loth to lay ſo much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if thoſe things which are impoſſible and difficult to our weakneſs and folly, might not be infinitely eaſy to infinite power and wiſdom.

Particularly the goodneſs and juſtice of GOD are not ſo difficult to apprehend, as the diſputes and contro-

controverſies about them have rendered them to many. When we conſider infinite knowledge and power, we may eaſily loſe our ſelves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them: there is ſomething concerning theſe, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our reaſon; we may not be able to underſtand how ſomething may be produc'd from nothing, becauſe it argues ſuch an exceſs of power, as we cannot comprehend; but yet we are forc'd to acknowledge, that either the world muſt be produc'd from nothing, or that matter was eternally of it ſelf, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite power ſhould be able to produce it from nothing. So likewiſe we are not able to conceive, how GOD can certainly know future events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain cauſes, becauſe we cannot apprehend infinite knowledge; but this we may eaſily be ſatisfied in, that infinite power and knowledge may be able to do, and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a child can imagine how a great mathematician can demonſtrate his propoſitions. Only this we are ſure of, as we can be of any thing, that no power can do that which is evidently impoſſible, and implies a plain contradiction. SERM. CXXX.

We are not able perhaps to reconcile the particular providences of GOD with his univerſal goodneſs, juſtice, and wiſdom, becauſe we cannot ſee to the end of his ways and works at one view, and ſee every part with relation to the whole; which would

SERM. CXXX.

appear very wise, if we knew the whole series of things, and saw the entire design together, as GOD himself does, to whom (as Solomon tells us) "all "his ways are known from the beginning."

So that however we may be at a loss in our conceptions of GOD's infinite knowledge and power, yet goodness, and justice, and truth, are notions easy and familiar; and if we could not understand these, the whole bible would be insignificant to us. For all revelation from GOD supposeth us to know what is meant by goodness, justice, and truth: and therefore no man can entertain any notion of GOD, which plainly contradicts these. And it is foolish for any man to pretend, that he cannot know what goodness and justice, and truth in GOD are: for if we do not know this, 'tis all one to us, whether GOD be good or not, nor could we imitate his goodness; for he that imitates, endeavours to make himself like something that he knows, and must of necessity have some idea of that to which he aims to be like: so that if we had no certain and settled notion of the goodness and justice, and truth of GOD, he would be altogether an unintelligible being; and religion, which consists in the imitation of him, would be utterly impossible.

Now these being the most easy and intelligible perfections of GOD, by which he is said in scripture to declare his name, that is, to make himself known to us, we should govern all our reasonings about GOD (as concerning his decrees, and his concurrence with the free actions of men, and his particular providence, which are things more dark and

SERM. CXXX.

and obſcure) by what is more clear; and we ſhall find in ſcripture, that in all theſe points holy men do conſtantly appeal to theſe unqueſtionable and intelligible perfections of GOD. "Wilt thou de- "ſtroy the righteous with the wicked? (ſaith Abra- "ham) that be far from thee. Shall not the judge "of all the world do right?" We may be miſ- taken; but GOD certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous; and he knows how to puniſh the wicked, and ſave the righteous: but we cannot be miſtaken in this principle, "that the "judge of all the world will do right." Thus Moſes ſatisfies himſelf and others, concerning the particular providences of GOD towards the people of Iſrael. Deut. xxxii, 3, 4. "I will publiſh the "name of the LORD: all his ways are judgment; "a GOD of truth, and without iniquity, juſt and "right is he." This we certainly know of GOD. So St. Paul, Rom. ii. 2. "Thou art inexcuſable, "O man!" Whatſoever excuſe men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a principle, "we are ſure the judgment of GOD is according "to truth."

Secondly, let us always conſider the perfections of GOD in conjunction, and ſo as to reconcile them with one another. Do not conſider GOD as meer power and ſovereignty, as meer mercy and goodneſs, as meer juſtice and ſeverity; but as all theſe together, and in ſuch a meaſure and degree as may make them conſiſtent with one another. The greateſt miſtakes in religion are certainly ſprung from this root, from ſeparating the perfections of

GOD,

SERM. CXXX.

GOD, and considering them singly, and framing such wide and large notions of one, as to exclude another: whereas the perfections of GOD agree together, and that is not a divine perfection which contradicts any other perfection. Among men indeed an eminent degree of any one excellency does usually shut out some other; and therefore it is observ'd, that power and moderation, love and discretion, do not often meet together; that a great memory and a small judgment, a good wit and an ill nature, are many times found in conjunction: but in infinite perfection all perfections do eminently meet and consist together; and it is not necessary that one excellency should be raised upon the ruins of another.

And if this had been well consider'd, men would not, by being too intent upon GOD's sovereignty, with neglect of his other perfections, have spoken those hard things about predestination: for the sovereignty of GOD doth by no means set him above the eternal laws of goodness, and truth, and righteousness. And if this were considered, men would not, by poring upon the justice and severity of GOD, be so swallowed up in despair: for GOD is not so severe, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning sinner. If this were well consider'd, it would check the presumption of those who encourage themselves in sin, by fancying to themselves a GOD of all mercy and goodness; and "because "sentence against an evil work is not speedily exe- "cuted, therefore their heart is fully set in them

"to

" to do evil:" for it is not goodneſs and mercy finally to bear with and forgive obſtinate offenders, but want of prudence and good government. SERM. CXXX.

Thirdly, among different opinions concerning GOD (as there always have been and will be in the world) chooſe thoſe which are fartheſt from extremity; becauſe truth as well as virtue uſually lies between the extremes. And here I will inſtance in that controverſy, which has much diſquieted the church almoſt in all ages, concerning the decrees of GOD; about which there are two extremes, the one that GOD peremptorily decrees the final condition of every particular perſon, that is, their everlaſting happineſs or miſery, without any regard or conſideration of the good or bad actions of men. The other, that GOD decrees nothing concerning any particular perſon, but only in general, that men found under ſuch and ſuch qualifications ſhall be happy or miſerable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themſelves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man muſt be that underſtands the difficulties on both ſides, had beſt take up in the middle opinion, that GOD decrees the final condition of particular perſons with reſpect to certain qualifications, which, ſpeaking abſolutely, are not in every man's power; but yet, under the influence of GOD's grace, which is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men, may be ſaid to be in our power, in the ſame ſenſe as St. Paul ſays, " I " am able to do all things through CHRIST " ſtrengthning

"ſtrengthning me:" for beſides, that this in all probability is the truth, there will be this advantage in it, that he that ſtands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the diſſenters on both ſides, than either of them will be to one another; becauſe the middle is not ſo far from either extreme, as the extremes are from one another. At the worſt, he ſtands faireſt for an impartial enquiry after truth, and when he has ſatisfied himſelf where the truth lies, he may more ſilently paſs over to it, without any great imputation of inconſiſtency; which cannot but be remarkable in him, who paſſeth from one extreme to another.

Fourthly, and laſtly, entertain no opinion concerning GOD, that doth evidently contradict the practice of religion, and a good life, though never ſo ſpecious and ſubtile arguments may be uſed to perſuade it. Truth is moſt eaſily ſeen, and diſcern'd in thoſe reaſonings and opinions which tend to practice; becauſe the abſurdity and inconvenience of them is ſooneſt diſcovered: whereas we cannot ſo certainly find out the truth or falſhood of thoſe opinions, which ſpeculative men deviſe in their ſtudies, without any conſideration whether they ſerve any real purpoſe of life or not. Men indeed are very apt to form thoſe notions, which are moſt remote from common ſenſe and uſe; becauſe more pains and wit are required to make them plauſible: but there needs no other argument to make a wiſe man deſpiſe them, than that they are unprofitable, and ſignify nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better.

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This is universally true in all kind of knowledge, but most considerable in the knowledge of GOD and religion; because that knowledge is of the greatest consideration. We need not scruple to admit some things, not so evident to natural reason, if we be satisfied of the truth of them, from an higher and more cogent reason: as that GOD has revealed it, and said it; this general reason may persuade us of a thing that is above and beyond natural reason: but we may not admit any thing for a divine revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of an holy life; because this is the main end of all divine revelation; and we know GOD, only in order to the service and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge that contradicts practice, as vain and false, because it destroys its end. There are many things that seem probable enough in speculation, which yet we most pertinaciously deny, because they are not practicable; and there are many things, which seem doubtful in speculation, and would admit of great dispute, which yet because they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unquestionable. The ἀργὸς λόγος, the idle reasoning of the Stoicks, was a thing contemned by the wiser philosophers, as vain and useless subtilty. Zeno pretends to demonstrate there is no motion; and what is the consequence of this speculation, but that men must stand still? but so long as a man finds he can walk, all the sophistry in the world will not persuade him, that motion is

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SERM. CXXX.

impoſſible. In like manner, they that would perſuade us, that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own ſanctification, than ſtocks or ſtones, and upon ſcripture-metaphors miſunderſtood, (as our "being dead in treſpaſſes and "ſins, and created to good works") graft notions, which are impoſſible and abſurd in practice, do not conſider that the natural conſequence of this is, that men muſt do nothing at all in religion, never think of GOD, nor pray to him, nor read his word, nor go to church; but ſit ſtill and be wholly paſſive to the operations of GOD's grace. But however this may ſeem plauſible, and men may think they add much to the glory of GOD's grace, while they deny any power in the creature; yet every conſiderate man will preſently apprehend, that this is by no means to be admitted, becauſe it contradicts practice, and makes all the commands and exhortations of GOD's word vain and to no purpoſe; becauſe it deſtroys religion, and diſcourages the endeavours of men; makes them ſlothful and careleſs of "working "out their own ſalvation;" than which nothing can ſet a man farther from GOD's grace and aſſiſtance, and more immediately diſpoſe him for ruin; and upon ſome ſuch falſe reaſoning as this, the ſlothful ſervant in the parable "hid his ta-"lent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth;" but when he was called to account, his excuſe was not admitted, but "he was caſt into "utter darkneſs." The two other particulars, namely how far we are to imitate the divine perfections,

fections, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation, and likewise to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here enjoin'd, "be ye perfect, as your FATHER which is in heaven is "perfect," is not impossible to us: both these I shall refer to another opportunity. SERM. CXXX.

A Table of the Texts of each Sermon.

SERMON CXI, CXII.

ROM. i. 18, 19. *For the wrath of* GOD *is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of* GOD *is manifest in them, for* GOD *hath shewed it unto them.* page 1815, 1838.

SERMON CXIII.

JOHN xiii. 17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* p. 1861.

SERMON CXIV.

LUKE xii. 47, 48. *And that servant which knew his* LORD'*s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* p. 1879.

SERMON CXV, CXVI.

JAMES i. 13, 14. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of* GOD; *for* GOD *cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

p. 1898, 1924.

SERMON CXVII.

MATTH. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. *Now when John had heard in prison the works of* CHRIST, *he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, art thou he that should come; or do we look for another?* JESUS *answered and said unto them, go, and shew John again these things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* p. 1946.

SERMON CXVIII, CXIX.

MATTH. xi. 6. *And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* p. 1973, 1999.

SERMON CXX.

ROM. i. 4. *And declared to be the* SON *of* GOD, *with power, according to the* SPIRIT *of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* p. 2021.

SERMON CXXI.

HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the* HOLY GHOST, *and have tasted the good word of* GOD, *and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall*

fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the SON *of* GOD *afresh, and put him to an open shame.* p. 2038.

SERMON CXXII, CXXIII.

HEB. v. 9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.* p. 2066, 2089.

SERMON CXXIV.

MATTH. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. *And* JESUS *came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the* FATHER, *and of the* SON, *and of the* HOLY GHOST: *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* p. 2113.

SERMON CXXV.

LUKE xiii. 24. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* p. 2138.

SERMON CXXVI, CXXVII.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.* p. 2169, 2194.

SERMON

SERMON CXXVIII.

LUKE xvi. 31. *If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.* p. 2222.

SERMON CXXIX.

LUKE xvi. 8. *For the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of of light.* p. 2243.

SERMON CXXX.

MATTH. v. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your* FATHER *which is in heaven is perfect.* p. 2269.

The End of the Seventh Volume.